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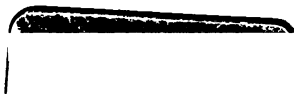
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HENCE THESE TEARS.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1872.

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247. 7. 187.



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HENCE THESE TEARS.



CHAPTER I.

JULIA IN TROUBLE AGAIN.

WE left Miss Bellamy inconsolable at the age of twenty-two. We take the licence of fiction, let loose the flood-gates of imaginary time, and find her again at forty-four, nearly consoled and tolerably comfortable. We should have to treble our coroners and enlarge our mad-houses, if all our youthful tragedies proved fatal. She, like Esdaile, had trusted Time.

Mr. Bellamy, of Bayswater, was no more. His personalty was sworn under a goodly figure. The *Illustrated News* obituary

recorded the amount, and gave a spirited facsimile of his armorial bearings. So his daughter rules the Tyburnian mansion in his stead, and inherits his riches. She is now beyond the illusions of youth. To the outer world she passes as an unmarried lady, opulent, plump, good-natured. She is able to live in what is termed "good style;" in fact, she need never see cold meat at dinner, and feels no anxiety about her butcher's book. She may roll about London all day in a barouche whenever and wherever she is minded. Her house is richly, and, what is better, solidly furnished. Everything about it is good of its kind, massive, comfortable. We may be excused for repeating that Miss Bellamy is, like her house, herself a comfortable personage, and richly furnished also in velvets and bangles, in lace flounces and bracelets.


We have stated that she will never see forty again; she does not allow this fact to prey upon her in the least. She has accepted middle-age complacently, and with complete good-humour. She enjoys a good



dinner, and revels in a hearty laugh. She spends her money freely, yet never incurs debt. She may be rather luxurious and self-indulgent ; she may love soft linen and to drape herself in gorgeous apparel ; yet she is aware that she is losing fast all claims to any beauty now, and she allows to herself the disappearance of her girlish charms with candid resignation. Such is Miss Julia Bellamy of Arabian Crescent.

We have designated her advisedly as Miss Julia Bellamy, for she still styled herself by her maiden name. In fact, since her father's demise, the secret of her disastrous marriage was only known to Mr. Esdaile and two other gentlemen. These were named respectively Mr. Marcellus Stimpson and Mr. Barnet Padfield, and were the executors and trustees appointed under the will of the late Julius Bellamy. Julius had rigidly tied up every sixpence of his ample fortune by a trust for the sole use and benefit of his daughter. And on Stimpson and Padfield had devolved a trust, likely enough to prove one of no ordinary difficulty and delicacy.

Returning again one moment to Julia herself, before we introduce her trustees to the reader, we may remark, that no less noteworthy than the ease or even grace with which she has accepted middle-age, are the cheerfulness and good-humour of her daily life, marred as they might be by the disagreeable shadow of her scampish husband lounging at German gambling-tables, and inditing at intervals florid and pathetic appeals for pecuniary assistance. Yet, in spite of all this, Julia is unsoured, sociable, trustful of her kind, and devotedly fond of small-talk. She "receives" a good deal of company as the saying goes, and heads quite a little coterie of her own. She is fortunate, moreover, in the possession of several most assiduous morning callers. In fine, Miss Bellamy is prosperous, and wakens up every morning in anticipation of a pleasant day. She bears lightly the thought of that one certain cupboard of her family history, which she keeps locked and curtained. She is heedful not to pry into its recesses more often than necessity compels her. Still, when the occasion *does*



come, she is not the person to shrink ; she opens the cupboard door cheerfully, airs and dusts its bones and other uncomfortable contents with the utmost placidity ; turns again the key in due time tenderly upon these horrors, has a good cry by herself for half an hour afterwards, revives a little towards tea-time, and possibly ends the evening at the Italian opera.

So, for some eight or ten years, has flowed the current of Julia's existence. Mr. Julius Bellamy having died some twelve years after Julia's elopement. But, a few days before we renew Miss Bellamy's acquaintance, an event has occurred of much moment in this narrative. The skeleton aforesaid has grown discontented in its comparative seclusion and oblivion ; in fact, the distant foreign cupboard by no means satisfies the needs of its spectral existence ; in short, to drop metaphor, on one fine afternoon, when Miss Bellamy was seated at the receipt of callers in a maroon velvet easy chair, her flounces easily and gracefully disposed about her in folds of expectation, without word or warning, the first harbinger

of society is announced in the person and wholly unforeseen arrival of Mr. Christopher Bellamy !

Julia was equal to herself, and sternly repressed a strong inclination to evade the crisis by fainting. She managed, by a great act of self-control, to assume a matter-of-fact manner in receiving Christopher. Being well aware that Christopher would endeavour, for his own advantage, to infuse an heroic and melodramatic vein into their meeting, she steadily ignored all that gentleman's attempts at sentimentalism ; received him in cold and chilling displeasure ; reminded him that by touching English soil he had forfeited his annual allowance ; and, if she and Mr. Esdaile chose, his liberty. She went on to say that she would at once inform her trustees of his return ; and finally appointed him calmly, like a linendraper, for the same hour on the next day to learn the decision of her advisers, regarding the further steps necessitated by his most ill-advised re-appearance. Christopher made one last attempt to get up a scene, but Julia firmly rang the bell, and he was

obliged to allow himself to be shown out by the servant, ignominiously vanquished. True, his first *coup*—that of sudden and un-announced return—had notably failed, both in theatrical effect, and in the more solid pecuniary results, which he had promised to himself on his homeward journey. Still, it was neither his interest nor his intention to drive Julia to extremities at their first interview. Then the fact, new to him, of his wife's property being in trustees' hands, had made it necessary to re-model his plan of operations. For, although his quarterly remittances had, since the decease of Julius Bellamy, always borne the signature, 'Barnet Padfield,' yet he had supposed this name to represent either a banker or a family attorney. Last, he had miscalculated the effect of time in forming Julia's character. He had left a malleable girl, he found a resolute woman. His first move then at Arabian Crescent was a failure; but Christopher's temperament was elastic: he was buoyant under disgrace and discomfiture, and he went whistling towards the Marble Arch, confident of better luck next time.

Of course, poor Julia quite gave way, after he was gone, and passed a most miserable and solitary evening. Not one vestige of her girlish love for the reprobate remained. The faint embers of blind liking which had managed to survive the forgery, had been finally stamped out by the news of his open and repeated infidelities abroad. She felt unfeignedly thankful that she had this one point so strongly in her favour—that of utter personal indifference to the man who had wrecked her happiness. She saw plainly enough that, had any grain of her old kindness for him survived, her present difficulty would admit of neither hope nor amelioration. But, sure of herself on this one vital point, she trusted, with certain monetary sacrifices, and the prompt assistance of her trustees, to persuade Christopher again to depart, without the intervention either of the Old Bailey or the Divorce Court.

With this resolve, she summoned by note, early next morning, her father's executors. The first one of these to arrive was Mr. Marcellus Stimpson; indeed, that gen-

tleman was noted for an almost morbid punctuality in all the transactions of his life.

This gentleman's surname deserves comment, before we proceed to his personal description. It cannot be denied that Stimpson is a disappointing name. It is so nearly Simpson, and misses being this so provokingly. It is a feeble name—a name, as it were, with a protest against itself; a name with a suggestion of a sneeze in it; a painful, lip-breaking name. You can't object to it, and yet it aggravates you.

So much for the name; now for its equally unobjectionable, and yet slightly irritating, bearer.

Mr. Marcellus Stimpson is described on his neat little black-letter card, as being of the Pneumatic Club, Pall Mall. He was thin, shrivelled, yellow-skinned, and about fifty. Hardly above the middle height, with regular, but rather expressionless, features. His attire was anything but showy; but his garments proved, on closer inspection, to be elaborated with the most scrupulous care and tidiness. His hair was

cut close to his head, and was as thick as a boy's; he bore in his hand the airiest of white hats, with the glossiest of black bands. Mr. Marcellus Stimpson would explain that he did not mourn for any particular relative, but that he liked the contrast of the colours. Indeed, one question of ever-reviving interest among the members at the Pneumatic Club was, whether that fellow, Stimpson, possessed belongings of any kind whatever. Undercut, late of the Bengal Civil Service, a prominent member of the Committee, could prove that Stimpson had none; inasmuch as Stimpson had dined last Christmas Day, at the Pneumatic Club, at one end of the eating-room, while old Major Gawler had feasted at the other. Now, Gawler was a patriarch; but the club curries had so infused themselves into Gawler's temperament, and perturbed his domestic relations, that none of Gawler's many sons would speak a word to their parent. Consequently, Undercut argued, that Stimpson must have either no belongings, or have quarrelled with those he had. But Stimpson was not quarrelsome; consequently, he

had none. Undercut, moreover, would entrench his position by analogies between the life of Stimpson and one Blizzard, club-member, deceased, whose will was written on club paper, and witnessed by the porter and a hair-dresser opposite the Pneumatic. Be this as it may, let us become personally acquainted with Marcellus Stimpson, and endeavour to form our own conclusions touching this remarkable man.

"You are arrived, Mr. Stimpson," smiled Miss Bellamy, extending her hand, "at the very nick of time that I was wishing for your appearance."

"My dear madam," replied Stimpson, with a succession of short, florid bows, "I am indeed grateful for your kind expressions. A call out of season is a social mistake. My maxim is, arrive when you are expected, come when you are summoned. A lady has then ample time to prepare herself for your visit, or to feign the graceful social fiction of absence from home, which merely means that she would rather enjoy her own society."

"You are a model of punctuality, Mr.

Stimpson," pursued the lady, with a suave nod of welcome, "what an accurate watch you must possess to be so exact! I can never remember to wind my own time-piece up for two days running."

"Pardon me," interposed Stimpson, with a deprecating hand; "the really punctual man never carries too good a watch, for he is then apt to trust it slavishly, and ends by being late. Punctuality is not a thing of cogs and wheels: it is a matter of education and temperament. It is the theory of allowing always a margin. The unpunctual man is usually in debt. Be it time or money, you must allow a margin."

"You are quite a political economist, Mr. Stimpson," murmured Miss Bellamy, fanning herself gently with her handkerchief.

"Indeed no," cried Stimpson, with faltering modesty; "I am only a man of system; a being who detests huggemugger, and likes to map things out beforehand."

"Can you tell me," said Julia, trifling with the rings on her fingers, among which

no plain gold one appeared, "whether or not Mr. Padfield can look in this afternoon? Did you come across him, during the morning, at your club?"

"His movements," said Stimpson, poising his neat little head sideways, not unlike a London sparrow, "are a blank to me. I have not been near the Pneumatic this morning. I was occupied; in fact, my hair was cut." •

"I fear," pursued Julia, with a change of manner, "that this trusteeship of mine is about to become troublesome."

"Ah!" sighed Stimpson, shuffling about on his chair, "Padfield must arrange all that. Padfield understands human nature. In fact, he rather likes human nature, and studies it in the rough. I confess I do not like it. It seems so very unsystematic."

"Then you did not come here direct, this morning?" pursued Julia, changing the subject.

"No," returned Stimpson, tilting his chair on to its front legs, "I had rather a special matter to see to, after my barber was gone. In fact, I have been invited to

dine this evening at a house, and in a neighbourhood with which I am unfamiliar. So I thought, I might as well, having an hour to spare, look up the street and house by daylight. As a rule, when you don't know where you are going to, your cabman does not either. A new house is not so easy to find after nightfall. It is so ill-bred to be late at a dinner-party. And one does not like to allow too much margin here; as, provided the cabman does accidentally find the door at once, it is quite as bad manners to be there too early. One arrives with the ice, and finds a housemaid dusting."

"Oh, Mr. Stimpson," struck in Miss Bellamy, raising her hands in playful dismay, "it's these dreadful clubs, that make you gentlemen so severe upon the least slip or *contretemps* in our poor private entertainments. I declare, it is positively wicked to have everything done so exactly right, and to one's liking."

"My dear Miss Bellamy," insisted Stimpson, with the air of approaching quite a solemn topic, "the club is a great realization. It is the only institution of modern

progress, which has done anything towards eliminating the uncertainties and ragged edges of human existence."

"If I were a fairy," laughed Miss Belamy, with a bantering glance at herself in an adjacent mirror, "and I certainly do not resemble one—I should punish the very next of you club epicures, who sneered at the underdone mutton of private life; by turning you into a garret for a month, with a sick wife, four rickety children, and no regular meals."

Mr. Stimpson shuddered visibly at this awful picture. He drew a deep breath, smoothed his hat-brim, and replied, tremulously :—

"What on earth do such paupers marry for?"

"Mr. Padfield shall answer that," cried Julia, as her second trustee was announced, and entered the room with the air of a man at a metropolitan railway station looking hopelessly for a seat when the train is in actual motion. He shook hands hastily with Julia, then darted at Stimpson and dashed through the same process with the man of

system, who seemed likely to fall to pieces under the buoyant vehemence of the salutation. Then he threw himself suddenly backwards into an arm-chair, and shook the very Crescent like an earthquake. Then he rubbed his head and breathed very hard.

While Padfield recovers his respiration, let us endeavour to describe him, as years have glided over the head of the social reformer, since he argued with Mr. Pausey in the police court. He is now fifty-two. His features are heavy, and his complexion is coarse and red. His forehead is large, high and prominent. His hair looks as if his hat had rubbed it off in patches here and there. He had a perpetual knack of ruffling back these remaining patches against the grain, and bullying them forward again, which was rather aggravating. If his hair was sparse, as a make-weight, his whiskers were long, wiry and straggling. A notable characteristic of the man was a deep, open untidy collar, which seemed to rasp his very ear-lobes. He gave one, generally, the impression of having sat up all night at a

stormy public meeting ; and of having been mauled and hustled in the doorway as he left.

“ You are on improvident marriages, eh ? ” ejaculated Padfield, at length recovered ; “ ah, there you come to my pet scheme, again, and as you come to it, so must England in the long run ; the savings’ bank ; nothing else, my dear madam, will meet this difficulty. Suppose a man takes a pound weekly. Well, government must step in and say, ‘ My good man, have you a wife and family ? ’ The artisan replies, of course, in the affirmative. Artisans always have wives and families. ‘ Very well,’ says the central government, ‘ I’ll trouble for five shillings. You shall save, in spite of yourself, or I’ll lock you up.’ ”

“ But supposing he will not go to work,” suggested Stimpson, “ when government docks his earnings ? ”

“ Or that he deserts his wife,” propounded Miss Bellamy, with a cough of hesitation, “ when he finds that he hasn’t enough to keep her.”

"Again, I say," returned Padfield, with unction, "lock him up; lock her up; lock them all up!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Stimpson, with a start, "that would be rather summary."

"Sir," pursued Padfield very red, with a hand upon his friend's wrist, "as a taxpayer, I will support hospitals readily and gaols with cheerfulness; but don't come talking to me about workhouses, hot-beds of idleness, nurses of imposition; communistic, happy-go-lucky establishments!"

"Dear me!" renewed Stimpson, very much depressed, "I leave these great questions alone. They annoy me."

"Come, Mr. Padfield," remonstrated Julia, with a silvery laugh, "if you lock us all up, who is to pay the turnkeys?"

"The community," returned Padfield, waving the question off with oceanic generality, "the community; who else?"

"Lord bless me," said Stimpson, with a futile smile, "who can that be?"

"The enlightened body of British tax and ratepayers," explained Padfield, in calm superiority; "and allow me to say,

that I hardly expected so feeble a question to be put to me by the gentleman opposite. I say, deliberately, feeble."

"I don't understand politics," murmured Stimpson, with an uneasy writhe; "and I don't wish to. I'm too busy. I've too much on my mind. I'm sure, I support the throne in a general way; and never sign anything they bring round about grievances."

"Ah, Mr. Padfield," protested Julia, smothering a yawn, "you should be more merciful to our ignorance. You might instruct and not demolish us. Never mind, Mr. Stimpson, we have our compensations. And when do you leave town Mr. Padfield? Mind, I have business for you now."

"I shall be guided," pursued Padfield, pompously swinging a double eyeglass; "by the general aspect of the political horizon. But my tour through the home counties must not on public grounds be deferred a week longer than necessary."

"What's it all about, Padfield?" asked Stimpson, with a restless air of anxiety. "None of your friends are ill, I trust?"

“Many of my friends are ill,” insisted Padfield, with heavy vivacity. “At least, I am sure they will permit me to call them friends; though I have only the happiness to-day of seeing them for the first time on this plat—I mean—Let me see—Oh, you asked if anything was wrong. I say emphatically much! The relations between landlord and tenant are wrong. I mean to study the subject on the spot. I propose to put a landlord on one side of me, and a tenant farmer on the other, and say ‘My fine fellows, tell us all about it. What is wrong between you.’ That is the practical way of tackling the difficulty. Very practical I venture to flatter myself.”

“And if they won’t answer?” suggested Stimpson, in a tone of hopeless resignation.

“I will gibbet them both,” returned Padfield, mildly.

“Mercy on us!” exclaimed Stimpson, with a rising in his throat.

“In the columns of an enlightened press,” pursued Padfield, enthusiastically. “I will expose them by name, serf and serfholder, they shall be held up to public

obloquy at every breakfast table in this happy country. Every intelligent Englishman on that particular morning shall scorn them as he raises his untaxed muffin to his lips."

"Poor fellows," said Stimpson, with real commiseration, "poor creatures."

"Your pity, Mr. Stimpson," expostulated Padfield, with the glow of eloquent inspiration literally hot upon him, "is miserably wasted. I mean to embody the results of my observations in a pamphlet, and dedicate it to a personal friend in the Lower House."

Miss Bellamy had joined in the conversation this morning with an obvious effort. And now she began to consult her watch with some signs of weariness and trepidation. She had judged it better taste to postpone her own anxiety, than to rush headlong into the discussion of her own complications, by allowing her trustees a short prelude of easy small talk; and she had hoped, that the transition to graver subjects would come soon, and naturally at either Stimpson's or Padfield's suggestion.

But Padfield was astride upon his political hobby, and shewed no symptoms of a halt. Therefore, as the morning was wearing away, she was forced herself to inaugurate the subject.

"My dear Mr. Padfield," she began, "forgive my interrupting you in the middle of a topic, in the discussion of which I am able to feel the keenest interest. But, this morning, alas, my anxiety must plead my excuse. You both, as my dear father's executors, know the one melancholy secret of my life. Now I entreat you to advise me. My wretched—I can hardly say husband—Christopher Bellamy, has returned to England."

"Your course is clear," broke in Padfield, with an elbow on each knee; "arrest him—instantly! Lock *him* up!"

"Oh, Mr. Padfield, I have not the heart for it. I cannot face the exposure of my early follies. I cannot bear this little Bayswater world, which I live among, to know, that I ever was legally a forger's wife, or that the nephew of my most respected father ever merited such an appellation."

"Pride, my dear madam," murmured Padfield, shaking his head. "You will excuse me—pride!"

"I know it," said Julia, with a weary sigh, unfolding her handkerchief.

"I hope you made a note," suggested Mr. Stimpson, mechanically, producing his tablets and a silver pencil-case, "of the precise hour and circumstances of his re-appearance?"

"It is bad enough that he has returned," said Julia, in a careless manner; "the fact alone is sufficient for me; hour and minute are immaterial."

"If you won't shut him up," proceeded Padfield, with a sarcastic smile, "I suppose you will not consent to petition for a divorce? You have proofs enough, remember. Gaol or a *vinculo* are the only two short cuts I see in this business. Excuse my bluntness, Miss Bellamy, but I am a practical man."

"Indeed you are," returned Julia, with a slight shudder. "I quite see the sound but rather drastic wisdom of your advice. But though it may seem to you Quixotic

and unpractical, I would rather let this wicked man make me miserable to the end of my days, than drag my sorrows into the hideous glare of a law-court; and hear everything I hold most sacred teased into the ridicule of a cross-examination."

"Can you give me the date?" asked Stimpson, with his pencil poised in mid-air, "of Christopher Bellamy's flight from England?"

"So you won't be divorced?" pondered Padfield, shrugging his shoulders. "Then we must pay him off. The worst course of the three; but, with this, my budget of expedients is empty. Pay him off, Miss Bellamy."

"In paper," added Stimpson, dubiously.

"Your clear sense is invaluable, Mr. Padfield," decided Julia, evidently relieved by the suggestion. "Yes, we must pay Christopher off; but how can we bind a man without honour? It breaks my heart to say it, but how can we bind him?"

"By fear!" exclaimed Padfield, emphatically.

"I wish I had never been born," wept Julia at this juncture.

"Stuff, my dear madam," cried Padfield, with a rough attempt at consoling her. "You are bound to be born. The law of averages is as certain as the sunrise. Meantime, send this fellow to me. I'm not afraid of his bluster."

"I expect him every moment," said Julia, looking up, and drying her eyes, "to learn what we decide upon."

"He won't be punctual," simpered Stimpson, prophetically; "I never knew a rascal who was."

"I cannot remain now," said Padfield, consulting his watch, "because I ought to be at an indignation meeting at St. Martin's Hall at this very moment. But you send this fellow on to my house to-morrow; tell him 'The Cedars, Brixton.' I will settle him there. Good-bye, dear Miss Bellamy, farewell Stimpson, I had no idea how the time went."

So Mr. Padfield rushed hurriedly downstairs, with a bundle of acts of parliament protruding from his great coat pocket.

"Pray remain, Mr. Stimpson," urged Julia, to her other trustee; "please 'don't leave me alone. I want some one to talk to and divert my thoughts until my—husband—arrives. Choose any topic, but the one with which I am most mentally occupied."

"Certainly, Miss Bellamy," said Stimpson, resuming his seat. "There is Padfield now, he is a volume in himself."

"A most energetic personage," assented Julia, faintly. "So thoroughly in earnest. Why isn't he in the House? You heard, how he adopted that poor boy years ago. Well, he is educating him now for the medical profession. Noble, is it not? He must do a great deal of good."

"Yes, oh, yes," agreed Stimpson, in the lowest spirits; "I suppose he must. Yet it seems rather like living near a water-mill when one is long in his company."

"His ideas," reflected Miss Bellamy, "have certainly a beautiful flow and rush about them."

"It was more," hesitated Stimpson, with a cough of excuse; "the roar, the rattle, the dust, and the splash, that was in my

mind when the comparison suggested itself."

"You dreadful man," scolded she, tapping him with her fan. "There, I won't allow a single word more against poor Mr. Padfield. He gives me invaluable advice, and does me so much good, and tells me all about the dissenting interest, and co-operative stores, and the democracy, and all, in fact, one ought to hear about."

"Why must Padfield always be exactly twenty minutes late for everything?" propounded Stimpson, in a dolorous tone of complaint.

"Poor man, he is so ridden to death with business, I suppose," explained Miss Bellamy, rather absently.

"Why doesn't he keep his watch then twenty minutes fast?" pursued Stimpson, with increasing gloom; "or rise twenty minutes earlier?"

"Shall you be able to see my husband to-morrow in company with Mr. Padfield?" enquired Miss Bellamy, reverting in spite of herself to the main subject of her

anxiety, and dismissing this query with a petulant gesture of her hand.

"My shirtmaker is coming," said Stimpson, seriously.

Miss Bellamy, harassed as she was, with difficulty restrained her merriment.

"You seem amused," pursued Stimpson, reddening slightly. "But it is natural. No lady can be expected to understand the significance of an interview with one's shirtmaker. It is not too much to say, that your ease or misery for months to come is in this individual's hands. Male happiness, my dear madam, often rests upon a single shirt-button. Few people have properly reasoned out the full bearings of this problem. You may smile, but I speak advisedly, when I insist that nothing requires more consideration than a new set of shirts. That shirt-collar of Padfield's now sets one's teeth on edge."

"You absurd man," ejaculated Miss Bellamy, tittering; "I am never sure you are quite—quite in earnest."

"You may be rasped under your ears," said Stimpson. "You may be throttled

like a dog at your wind-pipe. You may split your nails over your wristbands. Studs are a mere evasion of the difficulty. The button-holes will enlarge and then you lose them. Besides, clerks and shop boys run into studs. The button with all its faults and frailties is more gentleman-like."

"Then," rejoined Miss Bellamy, raising her eyebrows, "I suppose Mr. Padfield must first see Christopher alone."

Here, warned by an impatiently jerk at the door-bell, Stimpson had gathered up his hat and gloves with considerable alacrity.

"The person whom you expect," he said hurriedly; "allow me to take my leave."

"Come and see me again soon," entreated Miss Bellamy, extending her hand; "mind, I look to you, Mr. Stimpson, to mitigate any extreme measures which your co-trustee suggests against my unfortunate husband."

"Good-morning," bowed Stimpson, in full retreat, adding mentally, "I shall run

against this fellow on the staircase, unless I make a masterly flank movement into the dining-room."

So the philosopher of the shirt-button departed in the wake of the man of public meetings, and Julia remained to convey their ultimatum to the returned prodigal.





CHAPTER II.

A MAN TO HONOUR AND OBEY.

IN due time Miss Bellamy's servant brought up for her inspection a card, not over clean, inscribed "Christopher Bellamy, Baden-Baden."

Miss Bellamy coloured slightly and bit her lip as she read it.

"The gentleman — the person who brought this waits?" she demanded, looking down, and not liking to raise her eyes to her servant's.

The person had been let in just as Mr. Stimpson was coming down. In fine, the person was waiting now with a page to watch him, the footman having taken it on

himself to secure the safety of the umbrellas.

"I suppose," suggested Miss Bellamy doubtfully, "that this person had better be shown up."

The servant's face seemed to decide the question another way.

Miss Bellamy rose, with a gesture of disgust, and carelessly tossed the card into the drawing-room grate. Re-enter the servant followed by Christopher Bellamy.

He is now aged forty-seven, and much pitted with small-pox marks. But beside and beyond these, the twenty-two years' interval has in some respects laid its hand rather heavily upon the reprobate; in others he seems hardly to have felt the wing of time. The wrinkles about his eyes and temples are grown numerous, his voice is less mellow, and a tooth or two is gone. Still he remains a lithe, upright, well-moulded man, high-nosed, and now long-bearded, an addition which changes him much; with glossy crisp hair, thinner now and streaked with frequent gray, clothed in a rather shabby velveteen shooting-

jacket, a careless wispy scarf of daring scarlet round his throat, a broad-brimmed slouch wideawake in one hand; in effect Christopher's general appearance at this period of his career might be summed up, as something between the subject of a Vandyke picture run to seed, and a photographic artist out of employment.

Julia did not think it necessary to rise or even to extend her hand.

The new-comer perceived her intention, and, after a careless nod in her direction, flung himself unbidden into an easy chair. Here he affected to adjust a slovenly turn-down collar, humming little insolent fragments of operatic melody.

"Upon my word, Julia," he exclaimed, flaring up at last, "you carry it off well. Your pose of careless indifference is admirable. At this our second meeting after twenty-two years you have not a word to throw to me."

"What should I say to you, Christopher?" she demanded, with a touch of sadness; "I cannot say I am glad to see you, and it would only anger you to say I was sorry."

"You must burn my card even," he continued with a sullen glance at some fragments in the grate. "Everything of mine is leprous, not to be tolerated in this genteel mansion—"

"Christopher!"

"Ay, by the Lord Harry," he pursued, crushing his wideawake between his hands; "you think I have no feelings, that a kind word won't soften me, that a slight does not goad me to madness; that this roaming the earth to and fro for the last twenty-two years has been a pleasurable occupation."

"I think, Christopher," she interposed with gentle firmness, "that no good can result to either of us from your working yourself up into a passion. All question of tenderness between us has ended long ago."

"You told me another tale in the little city church-yard," he muttered between his teeth.

"I loved you honestly then," she murmured, with a shudder at the retrospect.

"There is no then in love, love is

always now," he rejoined, lapsing into sentiment.

"And you dare tell me this—after Florence?" and her eyes flashed fire.

"Pah, Julia, at your age," he broke in with brutal emphasis, "to believe in such school-girl sentimentality. Do you expect a man to remain tied through life to his good dame's apron-strings, and never to raise his eyes to the face of another woman? Bah, Julia, don't cant. You are to blame if any one is; marry a man one day, turn him adrift the next, and expect him to remain all the same a model of domestic virtue! Cant, Julia, utter cant! and you know it."

"Your taunt is unjust," said Julia, with a slight reiterated tremor; "but we shall never bring this interview to a close at this rate. I have a proposal to make to you, which I hope your self-interest—I appeal to nothing else—may induce you to accept. I have seen my trustees since your return. They advise me to have you arrested."

"Greatly obliged, I am sure," spoke Christopher, shrugging his shoulders.

"I refused to take this step," she resumed, wearily resting her chin upon her hand. "They then reminded me how easily I could obtain a divorce."

"I am grateful to these gentlemen," he sneered, baring his teeth; "I presume that a kind of dried ape that passed me on the staircase was one."

"God knows, Christopher," she continued, with an aspect of grave distress, "that I would burn my hand off sooner than face the divorce court; but you will drive me to it unless you will again leave England. I will make any sacrifice in reason to augment your present income if you will once more depart."

"Humph!" replied Christopher, crossing his legs, "that requires deliberation."

"Consider it then well, for heaven's sake," she entreated with palms pressed together, "and write me word how much you require as the price of your departure."

"I will be frank with you, Julia," precluded Christopher, with a feint of arranging his side hair; "I absolutely revel in this long-deferred return to my ancient

English haunts, and I must have a month's pleasure in London. I utterly refuse to be packed off to Calais by the return boat, like a bale of contraband goods, No, no, Miss Bellamy—see, I omit even my titular rights—in spite of all this bluster about arrests, mere elder pop-guns, I intend taking my 'fling' for some six weeks. By that time the Baden races will be coming on, and, if our good trustees will graciously permit my present beggarly stipend to be handsomely increased, I will then out of pure consideration for your feelings, Julia, be content to again disappear into space."

"Six weeks of you here, Christopher," she murmured with a heaving bosom; "ah, no! in mercy depart sooner. How shall I convince you, that I tremble actually myself, at what you may compel me to do, if you harass me with your visits here for six long weary weeks?"

"Here is an affectionate wife!" snarled Christopher with a darkening of the face. "Well, I shall not call, after all, so very frequently; and I may not be actually in

London all the time. I shall take a run down to the provinces."

"In what direction?" she questioned at once, with a certain tremor in her voice, and a slight rustle of her sleeves.

"That is my affair," he returned curtly, folding his arms. "Give no trust and receive no confidence. That's my maxim."

"So be it, Christopher, by all means," she replied, folding her hands before her; "it is far better so. I only asked my last question to prevent mischief. Take my advice, Christopher, and do not go to Cropshire, if that lay in your thought."

"Who ever mentioned Cropshire?" he retorted, viciously scoring the carpet with his heel.

"Where else should you go?" she replied with quiet conviction.

"I shall proceed where I choose," he exclaimed with a blustering assumption of offence. "I am no ticket-of-leave man, yet!"

"You rush on your own destruction," insisted Julia, with a deep-drawn sigh.

"And greatly you care if it were so," he

grumbled, marking an angry emphasis with his folded wide-a-wake. "I shall come and go as I please."

"I only spoke for your own good," hinted Julia, lowering her voice.

"This Bayard of yours, down there," resumed Christopher, with a sneer, "must be blessed, by this time, with a wife as round as a pin-cushion, and shoals of chubby children."

"Mr. Esdaile has never married, Christopher."

"Ha, ha! never recovered being jilted for your most humble servant. Well, I own he always did remind me of the bridegroom in 'Jock o'Hazeldean' that morning."

"He is noble and generous," broke in Julia, with a momentary flush of indignation.

"Spare me his virtues," said Christopher, yawning; "their recital is tedious."

"You cannot comprehend them," was the rejoinder, spoken decisively enough.

"I suppose we correspond just a little now and then?" insinuated Christopher,

with a wave of the hand ; "good wishes, and sincere regard, and platonics by the ream-full."

"I have never either spoken or written to him, since that day, Christopher ; knowing my unhappy story, he is too much a gentleman to come here."

"I suppose now," propounded Christopher, watching her keenly, with a sarcastic smile, "that, if you were 'certain-sure' that I did intend to drop down to Garwood, you would hold it your duty to warn your rejected lover against your rejected husband."

"I don't know," she mused, with just a quiver of the lips ; "such a letter would be a terrible one to write. I would give a hundred pounds rather than even begin it."

"Ease your mind," he exclaimed, with a change of manner, "you need never write it. I was only joking just now. I merely wished to test what terms you were on with my *cidevant* rival. What should I do at that miserable waste of grass and turnips ? I don't wish to run my head

into the noose, as you very wisely suggest."

"Christopher," she insisted, with heightened colour, "remember I am an old woman almost. Harvey Esdaile would hardly forego his rightful vengeance for *my* sake now. Don't cross his path."

"His head is too empty to be worth the breaking," replied Christopher, politely vicious. "But about the money help, that was a good reminder of yours, Julia. See, my clothes are rusty in tone and continental in outline. Besides, the gaieties of town are expensive. I have had the worst of luck at Baden, or I should not gladden the eyes of my impatient spouse at the present moment. I am in want of—subsidies."

"I foresaw your request," said Julia, unlocking a side-drawer of her writing-table, "and wrote to my bankers this morning. Your letters always end one way—money. I did not suppose you would care to cash a cheque of mine there. So here is enough in bank-notes to last you a month of riot in London."

"Thanks, Julia," said he, promptly pocketing the crisp bundle; "gratitude I cannot pretend to; these notes are, after all, only my own. But I forgive your spiteful allusion to a cheque."

"Where can I hear of you, Christopher?"

"European Hotel, Haymarket."

"Is there anything further to say?" she demanded with an evident wish to close the interview.

"By heaven!" said Christopher, firing up suddenly at her manner; "there is much more to be said. You cannot tell a husband to count his money and be off like a dog. You are to have all the kernels and to fling him a few husks, and then suppose, 'that there is nothing more to be said,' save 'get out, you vagabond.' Ay, ay, the cold streets for me, while here you sit in your rings and satins—in my house—on my money—for it is mine. You fine ladies are eaten up with selfishness. You have no one feeling of any depth beyond the care of your finery. You have not passion enough to be wicked; the study of your life is to make small-talk to dried up

apes and painted beldams. You hand weak cups of tea and nurse poodles. A poor devil asks your help, and he is shouldered off to perdition with an air of well-bred indifference—”

“Christopher!” she begged, “what good can come of all this virulent invective?”

“Julia,” he retorted, turning angrily towards her, “I will be heard, and you shall listen. Your days are spent in such an atmosphere of frozen conventionalities, that a little wholesome human passion will do you good. You have set your face as a flint. You call your self-love, duty. I verily believe that, if I slept in a dog-kennel and chewed cabbage-stalks, you would still receive your morning callers, and say you owed it to ‘duty’ to do so.”

“To blacken me,” interposed Julia, pressing her forehead, as though in pain, “cannot extenuate your own misdeeds.”

“Misdeeds!” echoed Christopher, stamping his foot; “what chance have I ever had from a boy? Endowed with keen senses, refined tastes, unusual abilities,

susceptible in the highest degree, and, mark the bathos, without one penny-piece to satisfy any of these longings. My whole life has been one long conflict and mistake. My very genius has always raised up adversaries to combine against me. The cringing second-rate plodders have passed me in the race. No one was jealous of them. Here am I, at forty-seven, fed on chance scraps, and the broken victuals of Dives !”

“Look you here, Christopher,” rejoined Julia, with some shadow of kindness in her voice, “you are clever, but who ever trusted you, friend or sweetheart, without repenting it? You vaunt your good impulses, and omit the fruit they have borne. If I am such as you choose to paint me, who has made me such? Have I, in this case, no reason to rejoice, if I can consume my weary years away in trifles. Whose hand has placed greater aims beyond my scope? Come, Christopher, we are both almost old people. Let us leave our past alone. We cannot alter it. I wish to forgive everything. To speak no single

harsh word to you, which I can avoid. Be wise and leave England again. It is not safe for you to be here. The executors of my father's will, or Mr. Esdaile might, at any moment, order your arrest. Return while you are free, and if money can ease your exile, you shall have it in abundance."

"I will think this over, Julia," he returned, wavering; "as I said before, I will think this over."

"Then, for God's sake," she insisted, growing extremely pale, "have the forbearance to leave me now! This interview has completely exhausted me."

"I am off, Miss Bellamy," he replied, rising, with a cold slight bow.

"Please do not come again," she pursued, earnestly supplicative, "till you see your way to leaving England, and then also give me previous notice of your call."

"Oh, certainly," conceded Christopher, ironically. "I wonder in what nation except England a man and wife could be on terms of such absurd ceremony."

"The tie between us," said Julia, with

an effort, "could be broken if I held up a finger."

"Which you won't, my lady, if I know you," mused Bellamy, as he departed with a jaunty and well-satisfied air.





CHAPTER III.

EMMA KLEIN, GOVERNESS.

AS Christopher lounged out upon the doorstep at Arabian Crescent, he brushed against a pretty-looking girl of nineteen, who was coming in. Christopher honoured her with a prolonged stare, which seemed to disconcert the young person not a little. He then turned on his heel, and disappeared, as Julia's footman closed the street-door, and masked Julia's attractive little visitor from his view.

On the servant enquiring whether his mistress was at home to Miss Klein, an affirmative answer was given, and the new-comer was ushered in.

Miss Bellamy was reclining at full length on the sofa.

"I've a racking headache, child," began Miss Bellamy, pressing her hand to her forehead; "I know, dear, that you will excuse me sitting up to receive you; but I have been so upset, that my head seems almost splitting asunder."

"I wish, dear Miss Bellamy," said the visitor, bending sympathetically over her, "that you had not troubled to see me, when you were feeling so unwell."

"Nonsense, Emma," replied the elder lady, holding out both her hands; "the sight of you distracts me, and does me good. My eyes are sore with tears, and you are good for them. So you have got a situation, love? actually got one! Well, that is lucky. Draw up your chair close, and let me hear every word about it."

"Wait till you are better," persuaded Emma Klein, patting the hand of her patroness.

"I will hear this very second," returned Miss Bellamy, with a faint smile; "and if you do not begin your recital at once, I

shall feel myself compelled to sit bolt upright, and to assume my best company manners."

"Then," said Emma, pushing Miss Belamy gently back, and re-adjusting her pillow, "we will begin with the wages. Fifty pounds a year! am I not indeed fortunate?"

"How the poor child's eyes glitter," thought Julia to herself, "over this miserable stipend, which would barely buy me two best velvet gowns."

"Then Kidston Manor," Emma proceeded, with heightened colour, "is situated in charming scenery, the air is bracing and salubrious, the subsoil is gravel, and the change of going there is in every way delightful."

"And your employers, dear, that are to be?"

"Dreadfully rich—the banking interest, and money-no-object sort of people. Is it not lovely? It is with a Mrs. Rutherford."

"Ifancy I have heard the name before," interposed Julia, thoughtfully; "and the

associations connected with it strike me at the first blush as unpleasant ones ; yet how or where, my memory is still a blank."

"The husband," explained Emma, pausing to select the phrase, "seems a serious, go-to-meeting kind of person. He makes a great deal of money, and is very fond of missionaries."

"Rutherford ! Rutherford !" mused Miss Bellamy, abstractedly, closing her eyes ; "the name haunts me somehow. Ah ! I remember now. What a strange fatality ! The whole current of my life seems to set towards one—rock. Then this must be the Basset Rutherford whose name I once saw—hem—written."

"My chatter has somehow renewed your distress," murmured Emma, with anxiety depicted in her looks.

"And this is your future master, child ?" enquired her patroness rather nervously.

"The name is certainly Basset Rutherford, now you re-call the fact to my memory," allowed Emma, in a disturbed voice, which endeavoured to sound cheerful and sanguine.

"A strange link," continued Miss Belamy, dwelling on the words, "in a strange story. You, the child of my old governess, are going to the house of a man, whom I have hardly seen, and yet, whose name is associated with all that is bitter in my past. Look at me, Emma!—a common-place, prosaic, middle-aged spinster. Don't interrupt me. Shall I give you a piece of advice? You are young and inexperienced, pretty and credulous. You will get a lover—a month hence—a year hence. Shall I tell you how to preserve your peace of mind? Do not believe one syllable he tells you. There—now run away, and let me go to sleep."

But Emma paused irresolutely, and hovered still about the sofa.

"If I could only help you, dear Miss Belamy," she murmured, in passionate earnestness.

"Look here, child," returned Julia, impulsively, again sitting up, "did you meet any person leaving this house as you arrived?"

"Yes," nodded Emma, with a faint blush,

"I met a kind of music-master, who stared a good deal."

"Can you guess his errand?" demanded Julia, with a hand on Emma's wrist.

"To tune your piano," hazarded Emma, at a venture.

"No, child!" sighed the elder lady, with an attempt at a hollow laugh; "he is, if anything, a professor of discord. Did you think him handsome——?"

"I think I did," reflected Emma, with an effort; "but then his sinister expression spoilt his features. I thought, it comes back now, that he was not a very good man."

"You are right, child," said Julia, with a sharp nod. "He is a prowling vagabond, a beggar of the worst order."

"Who empties your purse," supplied Emma, spelling the looks of her patroness, "because you are kind, and because this bad man knew some one of whom once you were dearly fond. Have I read your riddle right, dear Miss Bellamy?"

"Partly right," said Julia, with a faint smile, "and partly wrong. You will write

to me, child, how you fare in your new life ? I should like to know into what kind of man this Basset Rutherford has grown up. Send me long letters, dear, but don't cross them."

Emma laughed, and began to trifle with her parasol.

"The days of my life," she said, with her eyes on the carpet, "may be weary and barren of interest; but writing will be a pleasure, and I will write."

"And remember my last word of advice," spoke Miss Bellamy, with a warning forefinger; "for you are pretty, child; and if I don't tell you so, some knave will."

Emma stood before her patroness, a picture of engaging confusion.

"I am the old hen," continued Julia, between a smile and a tear, "who preaches to a young duck on the danger of immersion. I know that I now lift my voice on high with equal futility; but I will cackle on, all the same, my last warning: 'Don't believe one word the men say to you,' and you may defy fate, and live as merry as a grasshopper!"



CHAPTER IV.

A DRIVE IN A PHAETON.

MRS. RAYMOND emerged from the office of her brother-in-law, and proceeded to retrace her steps towards Garwood Station.

Her mind was occupied by conflicting emotions, as she toiled along the rugged pavement of the High Street. At one moment, solicitude for her packing cases reigned supreme ; the next, all minor cares were superseded by pleasurable anticipations of change in the new existence which was dawning upon her. The sight of several private vehicles, at anchor before some of the High Street shops, led Mrs. Raymond at once to speculate upon the

actual names, possible abodes, and probable incomes of their occupants. In the mind of this good lady, the rural gentry were invested with the attractive attributes of mystery and fascination. She had hitherto only studied from afar the territorial aristocracy through novelistic lenses, and the medium of the fashionable press. Hence, she felt pardonably curious to encounter one or two actual and incarnate specimens of the squirarchy.

On gaining the station, in a breathless and palpitating condition, Mrs. Raymond at once penetrated to the cloak-room. There, the welcome array of her own corded treasures, in complete tale and untampered security, relieved her of all apprehension on that score. So Mrs. Raymond sank down upon her bulkiest possession much exhausted, and proceeded to fan her heated face with a pocket handkerchief, edged with imitation lace. While occasionally she murmured incoherent expressions of thankfulness at having now all she held most precious under her immediate eye.

As Mrs. Raymond gradually regained her normal temperature, she began to be aware, that she was not the only inmate of the cloak-room. A young and pretty woman was seated opposite, solving some problem in railway algebra from a time-table. At her feet stood one box, a fairly capacious one, but no further luggage. As Mrs. Raymond's intervals of respiration lengthened, she was able to decipher a label, which the skirts of her companion's plain black-silk dress nearly masked from view. This was inscribed—

MISS E. KLEIN,
Passenger,
Kidston Manor,
Garwood Station,

With care. This side upwards.

All this Mrs. Raymond duly perused, nor did any grammatical doubts disturb her mind, as to whether the concluding directions referred to Miss E. Klein, passenger, or to Miss Klein's effects. The word "Manor" did at once arrest her attention; there was a ring of selectness

about its sound, an actual aroma of squire-dom in its syllables. She had heard of the Rutherfords, and believed this was their country seat. Mrs. Raymond recalled to herself having heard that great people often travelled in plain clothes; therefore she fell to inward debate, whether this very young lady might not be worth cultivating.

"Hem!" began Mrs. Raymond, clearing her throat, "Hem! dear me!"

Emma Klein glanced up instantly.

"This," continued Mrs. Raymond, laying one hand against her side, "is tedious work for both of us, my dear. Ovens in summer and ice-pits in winter, are their stations and their carriages."

"Whose, pray?" demanded Emma, somewhat amused, with her forefinger in *Bradshaw* to retain the page.

"Why, these railway people," rejoined in scorn her companion. "Who else, indeed? Engineers, board-rooms, directors, and whatever nonsense they please to call themselves. And for building places to catch draughts their equals I have seldom

seen. A lozenge, my dear? You won't have one! Ah, well, you don't need them yet? Peppermint or ginger? I suppose you are waiting to be fetched away? So am I. Lord help us both!"

"Then," said Emma, disentangling her veil from her earring, and then wearily changing her position, "I wish you a speedier reprieve, than I am likely to meet with."

"Some oversight?" threw out Mrs. Raymond in intervals of a lozenge.

"Heaven knows," pouted the younger lady with a shrug of resignation, "they might have sent a carriage—fly—gig—cart—whatever the local savages journey in hereabouts. I declare that I should hail the sight of a hearse or a water-cart," she concluded, in quiet desperation.

"Nearly every one about here," said Mrs. Raymond, in a matter-of-course voice, "keeps their private carriage. There is, consequently, hardly any demand for—hem—flys."

"I naturally endeavoured," explained Emma, drumming with one foot upon her

box, "to order up something from the village—"

"Town, my dear," corrected the elder lady.

"The idiotic porter," laughed Emma, "of this benighted place, blandly informed me, that to-day *the* station fly was retained for a local wedding. Viewed as a study of dialect, my informant was an interesting personage. In other respects he is, I fear, of the feeblest mental power."

"I don't quite follow you," from Mrs. Raymond, chewing the ivory end of her parasol.

"Why," explained Miss Klein in a titter, "when I pressed him, with all the emphasis I could summon, as to whether he saw any means of transport for my baggage or myself, to this Kidston Manor of theirs, he muttered, in hopeless stolidity, 'None, as he know'd on,' and then crept away into a kind of side-den in the wall, where the creature seems to live among palm-oil and signal-flags."

And Emma gave way to a hearty laugh at her own forlorn and deserted condition.

Mrs. Raymond was interested in, and yet puzzled by her companion, so she suggested, as a polite and judicious feeler, the following remark :

“ Is this your first visit to—hem—Kidston Manor ? ”

It was undeniably pleasant, she felt, to converse about such places. There was something soothing and satisfying to the lips in the mere pronunciation of this country seat. Kidston Manor. How nicely it ran ! It was nearly as good as rolling out, “ His Royal Highness, the Duke of Sussex.” So ran the current of Mrs. Raymond’s meditations.

“ First visit,” returned Emma with a nod ; “ Oh, dear, yes. At least,” she added archly, “ it will be my first visit when I get there. A qualification which, as events are now, seems wholly irremovable.”

Mrs. Raymond took refuge in a platitude—

“ My dear, let us hope for the best ! ”

“ Do you know these people, the Rutherfords ? ” was Emma’s next enquiry, and

she made it carelessly enough. "I fancy every one about here must know them. My hopeless porter evidently did, only he could not arrange his ideas on the subject sufficiently to make me any the wiser. For you must know I never set foot on Cropshire soil before, and, I think, I should have survived the loss, if I had never done so altogether."

Mrs. Raymond greatly relished a dialogue in which the names of local magnates could be handled in this free-and-easy fashion of allusion. To hear them styled "these people, the Rutherfords," was only a few steps worse than making their actual acquaintance. But Mrs. Raymond was loath to confess that she also was a stranger to the charmed Cropshire circle. So she evaded the difficulty for the present by a dexterous prevarication.

"I believe," she said, severely, "every one at Garwood knows the name of Rutherford."

"Yes, yes," cried Emma impetuously, "we all know that. But, I suppose, you don't like speaking out before a total

stranger. You may be right, but it is provoking enough. Here I am going to certain people, and I cannot pick up one crumb of gossip, one shred of information about them on my journey; though you know, and the porter knows, and all the good town of Garwood is equally well-informed!"

And Emma, after concluding these remarks with some petulance, again bent her head to peruse the literature of railways.

Mrs. Raymond's curiosity about her young companion was becoming absolutely intolerable. Each fresh remark of Emma's had mystified her more than its precursor. Now came the reaction. For she reflected that no person was likely to go as a visitor to a country house of whose inmates she professed entire ignorance. Dreadful suspicion! This might be only a lady's-maid on her way to a new situation! And, horror, Mrs. Raymond had been profusely civil, and had even offered the peppermint drop of social equality to a girl of that class! Mrs. Raymond felt, that her own position and prestige would be for ever

compromised, should it hereafter transpire, that on this, the day of her entry into Cropshire society, she had chatted freely with a lady's-maid. If this was the melancholy truth, one thing was clear, it behoved her, Mrs. Raymond, without delay to teach this presuming young person her place, and to suggest to this girl a more proper deportment in the presence of her superiors. Mrs. Raymond, with this conviction, resolved to test her companion by one more question, and then to arise and crush her in the full majesty of an outraged British matron.

"Well, indeed," ejaculated Mrs. Raymond with a spice of incipient condescension in her tone, "it seems very inconsiderate of these Rutherfords, as you call them, to have forgotten to send for you. Suppose it had been game now, or a barrel of oysters, they must have spoilt, for I call the weather not sultry but sulphurous."

Emma gave a short laugh, which just showed her small regular teeth, by way of rejoinder to Mrs. Raymond's argumentative sympathy for her present desolate condition.

"Who knows," she considered after a pause, with mock gravity, "if my arrival at Kidston is really as important as the fish for dinner or the grouse for second course?"

"You don't say so," observed Mrs. Raymond, on whom the irony of these comparisons was nearly lost. "Well, well," she continued, in a voice of increased patronage and condescension, "we must all remain content in our allotted stations."

"That I fully concede," said Emma with a touch of irritation, "but my present situation is tiresome for all that."

"Indeed," returned Mrs. Raymond in supercilious surprise at even this mild outburst, "if you take pains and are steady, I have no doubt your situation will improve."

Emma's vexation was overpowered by her amusement, so she rejoined, as sedately as she was able,—

"I shall do my endeavour, as the rustics say. And after work-hours I shall mend stockings, read tracts, and hem dusters."

At this juncture Mrs. Raymond became

dimly aware that her younger companion was laughing in her sleeve at her self-constituted mentor. This, joined to the recent disclosure of Emma's social condition, decided Mrs. Raymond to conclude the conversation, with an inward reflection on the petulance of domestic servants at the present epoch. In this mood the good lady sighed several times, put her feet up on a waiting-room chair, and proceeded to resign herself to the composing influence of slumber.

This Mrs. Raymond was not then destined to enjoy. An interruption occurred in the entrance of the station porter, which dispelled any idea of sleep. He stared with much earnestness in the direction of the younger lady, and essayed to speak; but all appropriate words in which to clothe his message seemed to have passed beyond his lingual command. He pointed, therefore, mysteriously at the wall some feet above Mrs. Raymond's bonnet, and ejaculated in a husky voice,—

“He's a-waiting just through there.”

Mrs. Raymond at once changed her seat

in some trepidation. Possibly she expected to see something leap out, after the manner of harlequins, through the panel above her head.

Now, viewed as a dramatic effect, the way in which the porter had rushed into the middle of his subject was truly masterly. But, considered as an effort to convey his meaning to either lady, the above announcement was at first a decided failure.

After a pause, during which Emma and Mrs. Raymond had exchanged glances of bewilderment, a light seemed to break in upon Emma; and, rising with an air of joyous relief, she advanced towards the porter, saying—

“You mean that I am sent for from Kidston?”

“For the matter of that, miss,” replied the porter, sententiously, “I can’t say I do mean it. There’s no Kidston in this, no, nor fly neither. But what there is,” he concluded, vaguely, “will do as well as fly or Kidston. So you come alonger me, my boy.”

This concluding exhortation was applied

to Miss Klein's trunk, which the porter proceeded to shoulder.

"Stay," commanded Emma, with a vexed little stamp of her foot; "I insist on knowing *what* will do as well!"

"Master Gilbert Bra-amley," grinned the porter, with a long, broad roll on the letter a.

"Who?" cried Emma, with a glance of impetuous perplexity.

The porter threw an additional haze upon her difficulty, by the following explanation:—

"I was raised on his land."

"Whose land, you hopeless man—this boy's?"

"He ain't no boy," spoke the porter—"six foot."

"Is he a gentleman, then?" hazarded Emma, dubiously.

"A ra'al gentleman," decided the porter, with an emphatic jerk of his head. "Gentleman, indeed," he repeated, in a tone of indignant conviction, "why, he has champagne for luncheon every day of the week!"

Having demonstrated Mr. Gilbert Bramley's gentility by this unanswerable argument, the porter expectorated mildly, as a man who had proved his point, but who did not mean to press unduly a fallen adversary.

"Is he drinking champagne now?" questioned Emma, in hopeless perplexity.

"Lord bless you, miss," narrated the porter, with a sudden gush of lucidity, "he be in his mail phaeton."

"Well," persisted Emma, "what did he say?—what message did he give you?"

"He drove up," continued the porter, thus adjured, "to ast for parcels. 'Jack,' says he, (I was raised on his property) he says, says he, 'Jack.'"

At this point the porter appeared to lose the thread of his narrative, but found it again, like a man, soon afterwards, and proceeded—

"'Any parcels to-day?' says he. 'Nos-sir,' says I, 'hoping I see you well, being raised on your land, if I might so far make free.' 'All right, Jack; then, I'm off,' he says. He *might* have said, 'Then, I'll

cut ;' but, now I considers of it again, I expects he says, ' Then, I'm off.' "

" My good man," interrupted Emma, " do come to the point, and spare me the rudeness of keeping this gentleman so long unanswered."

" I'm coming to it, miss, directly," continued the porter, with a threatened return of haziness, which, however, passed off. " ' Parcels none, squire,' says I ; ' but, if I might make bold, a young lady for Kidston.' "

" Hem," murmured Mrs. Raymond, with a cough of protest, " a young lady, indeed !"

" ' Can't she get no trap, Jack ?' says he (he uses me formiliar, being raised on his property ; and he knows it, as does his agent likewise ; and they would neither of them deny it, or why call me Jack ?) ' She says she can't get devil a trap, squire,' says I.' "

" I said no such thing," interrupted the young lady, with an angry blush.

" It don't siglify," pursued the unmoved porter, waving his hand ; " *he* didn't mind it, if you did ; for he calls to me, ' Tell her

to jump up, for I pass the Kidston lodges ;' and I *do* tell you to jump up."

Having thus spoken, the porter pulled himself up very short indeed ; and twisting his fingers into the cordage of Miss Klein's box, he spake no more, but beckoned her silently to follow him, like the ghost in *Hamlet*.

Light at last. A good-natured gentleman of the neighbourhood offered Emma a lift to her destination. That was the substance of the porter's portentous rigma-role.

The porter disappeared unhidden with the box ; but Emma, pausing, during a few moments of embarrassment, shook out her flounces, and hastily smoothed her hair.

Mrs. Raymond's somnolence had long since given place to angry curiosity. This feeling had latterly deepened into indignant surprise. The good lady now sate erect with ruffled plumes, and watched with a stern glance the movements of a young person, whom, she feared, was about to take a step in all respects forward and reprehensible. Here was a gentleman of

position, as his diet and equipage clearly indicated, about to be deluded by his own easy good nature and the mis-description of a railway porter, into driving through the town of Garwood by the side of a lady's-maid ! Plainly she, Mrs. Raymond, ought to intervene and prevent so glaring a scandal.

"My dear," commenced Mrs. Raymond, with a lisp of patronage, and a tremor of hesitation, "I feel it my duty to remind you, that, situated as you are, it would be extremely indelicate and strange for you to accept this gentleman's offer—an offer which he has only too evidently tendered under a mistaken estimate of your—hem—social position !"

Emma's forbearance plainly gave way under this, Mrs. Raymond's, crowning impertinence.

"I *did* hesitate," returned Miss Klein, in cold tones of displeasure, "till you were good enough to interfere. Your wholly uncalled-for advice has at once decided me to accept Mr. Bramley's kind assistance."

So Emma left the waiting-room, and

moved deliberately to the station-door, in some curiosity as to what manner of man her unknown rescuer might be.

Mr. Gilbert Bramley was leaning back in his mail-phaeton as she appeared. He was puffing indolently at a cigar, and flicking listlessly with his whip at the flies about his horses' ears. Well-made, six feet high, twenty-seven, with a long light silky beard, and short light curly hair; regular English type of features, and keen grey eyes. His shooting jacket fitted his figure to a hair's breadth, and his round felt hat was, in its way, a masterpiece. Gilbert Bramley, in short, represented a young opulent Briton of the upper class, whose attire was beyond criticism, and his outer man faultless and without reproach. Bramley's friends compendiously described him as "deuced handsome, and devilish good-natured," intensifying their approval by an unnecessary frequency of allusion to the powers of evil.

While the porter was arguing inside with Emma Klein, Bramley leant back in his phaeton, smoking and musing to this effect :

"A strange woman," he thought, "this aunt of mine, Mrs. Rutherford. Why this diplomacy? Why cannot she tell me straight out what she requires? She writes me word to come here at a certain time, on a certain day, as her horses are lame—an evident fib—and drive over to Kidston a young lady, related to her husband; who will be waiting here, and whose name she leaves me to discover for myself from the lips of the fair unknown. Aunt Harriet is evidently sportive, and, I suppose, wishes me to marry. In obedience to her orders, here I am. Jack informs me such a young lady is actually now on the company's premises. I send him in to fetch her out, and await with faint curiosity our good aunt's selection for her dutiful nephew. Which last word reminds me, that this will be, ten to one, that niece of Rutherford's in London, whom I have heard before about. The ladies are all match-makers; and my affectionate aunt is no exception to the rule."

Preceded by the porter who bore her box, Emma timidly approached the side of

the mail-phaeton. Gilbert Bramley glanced with some slight anxiety at the young lady. Apparently, his hurried survey of Miss Klein was not unfavourable, for he himself alighted with some alacrity, and, raising his hat, addressed Emma with easy deference.

"Our friend here," he commenced, indicating Jack, the porter, "tells me that I can be of some ridiculously slight service to you. Garwood station is notoriously flyless. I pass naturally close under Kidston gates on my return. May I help you up?"

Miss Klein replied by a dainty little courtesy, and a confused murmur of inarticulate thanks; placing one foot on the phaeton step, she managed to reach her seat with hardly any assistance from Mr. Gilbert Bramley, though he stood ready, and anxious to tender aid. Soon Bramley was in his place, beside her, adjusting various wraps about the young lady for a few seconds before they started.

Then Mrs. Raymond emerged from the shadow of the station door, whence she had watched these proceedings with a beating heart. A light breeze fluttered her

widow's weeds, and slumber had disarranged both her tresses and her bonnet. Quivering with eagerness she felt, that now or never, she must intervene, and save the prestige of the local aristocracy. Not a moment was to be lost. Mr. Bramley was just touching his horses with the whip. The young person had ensconced herself in triumph at his side, and regarded Mrs. Raymond from her coign of vantage with defiant and disrespectful glances.

Mrs. Raymond trembled, but she stepped up to the side of the mail-phaeton all the same.

"It's a lady's maid!" she gasped; a nervous fit of coughing prevented her from continuing her explanation.

"Are you?" replied Bramley, carelessly; "you see, I've no room."

And he drove away.

Emma, with difficulty, suppressed her merriment.

Mrs. Raymond, in the distance, confided her griefs in loud asides to the porter Jack, who had also assisted at the departure. She remarked, that Emma had driven

away "like any duchess;" denied, that it was customary for ladies' maids to go about in young gentlemen's phaetons, but apprehended, that some people's forwardness would push itself in anywhere. She concluded by fearing, that, if you supplied mendicants with the accessories for equine locomotion, their ultimate destination would be far from satisfactory.

"What is that old lady scolding the porter about?" enquired Bramley, as they drove out of the station yard.

"I fear," returned Emma, with demure amusement, "that I have caused her vehemence. She merely scolds the luckless porter in the absence of my more culpable self."

"Angry with you?" questioned Bramley, politely; "that would be impossible."

"She is a weary old thing," smiled Emma, with a furtive side-glance at her companion, "I never set eyes on her before. She was abandoned by her friends, like I was, at that miserable station. So she improved the occasion by lecturing and questioning me. I rebelled mildly, and she

became excited. Perhaps, she will never be called for again—I am sure, I hope she won't."

"You see," laughed Bramley, touching his steeds with the whip, "I literally had no room. I have certainly compassed an escape. Had Jack advocated her claims first, she would have been lecturing me now, I suppose."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Emma, quickly; "she fancied me some local magnate, and then, finding her mistake, lost her temper."

"Capital!" struck in Bramley; "anyhow, I cordially congratulate myself and my phaeton on her substitute."

Emma Klein blushed up to the eyes.

"This is Garwood Village," pointed Bramley, with prompt endeavour to tone down the rough edges of the previous compliment, "our local metropolis: a tumble-down stagnation some two centuries behind the remainder of the universe."

"Oh! do tell me all about it," entreated Emma, again at her ease. "I feel a special interest in Garwood."

"In the first place," continued Bramley,

with mock gravity, "we want a doctor, can you recommend one?"

"Seriously?"

"In sober sadness; our local practitioner is bankrupt."

"But in case of illness?" suggested Emma.

"We are fain to send for the person, who at periods of lesser medical pressure, usually confines his attention to the equine and bovine sections of our village community," was the grave reply.

"Dreadful!" said Miss Klein, with a shiver.

"In the next place," narrated Bramley, "we do *not* want a lawyer, inasmuch as that is his house which we are just coming to."

"It seems a dear old place," remarked the young lady, who felt inclined just then to view even Garwood through a rose-coloured medium.

"Hem," doubted her companion, "that is as tastes go. Let me inform you that Mr. Lawyer Raymond lives there in company with a legion of ghosts and one house-

keeper. Local sages affirm his upper storey is full of them. I'm a Garwood man, so I'm bound to support local wisdom. Ghosts, you know, never harm a lawyer."

"Delightful!" cried Emma, with much vivacity, "one always knows a ghost-house from its architecture."

"Now, if you look at once," indicated Bramley, "and don't mind leaning over a little towards my side, you will catch a section of old Raymond's bald head through his own office window-pane. There! didn't I tell you so? It is only right that we natives should exhibit our chief notables to strangers."

"You make an admirable cicerone," beamed Emma, happy and animated.

"For the instant," said Bramley, reining in his steeds, "we are in the very centre of Garwood. That is the market-cross, or rather a flight of steps without one. That is the market-house opposite. A quaint structure enough."

"Is it used now for any purpose?" hazarded Emma.

"Sessions and such-like," said Bramley,

colouring slightly, and hurrying on his narrative ; " see, those are our two policemen, who prevent us all being robbed and murdered. They don't often leave the bench of our local inn. Can you make the sign out ?"

" A woman in a white robe," hazarded Emma, with a surprised glance, " holding a laurel crown, and having no head. Well, that is dreadful ! What does it mean ?"

" We accept facts unexplained," laughed Bramley, " in Cropshire. All I know is that there has been a ' Headless Woman' inn at Garwood as long as I can remember. That suffices me."

" And I see a river upon the horizon," interposed Emma, in radiant enjoyment.

" The Bevern," supplied Bramley. " Did you never see Bevern before ?"

" Only in the geography books," said Emma, with a fugitive colour rising to her face.

" Gradually," pursued Bramley, as he stole an approving glance at his companion, " we shake off the good town of Garwood,

thence as your geographical authors would also say, we approach a purely bucolic region—”

“Oh, what nice alderneys those are grazing!” appealed Emma, as pleased as a child at a pantomime.

“If I was fresh from London I should appreciate them better,” said Bramley, with a careless jerk at his reins; “as it is, I see nothing but flocks and herds and beasts of the field from lark’s song to glow-worm’s glimmer; in other words, from dawn to dusk.”

“I should so like to see a glow-worm!” exclaimed Emma, impetuously.

“So you shall,” returned Bramley, eagerly, “if you will allow me to be your guide to a living Cropshire specimen.”

“I fear Mrs. Rutherford might—” hesitated Emma.

“Object to entomology,” he supplied with a laugh, “while you are under her charge.”

“Are all your cottages black and white?” Emma questioned.

“Never mind the cottage,” he insisted,

"but consider attentively yonder pony tethered to its gate. I am fortunate in being able to introduce to your notice another Garwood notable."

"The pony?"

"Partly yes," he continued; "that's the squire's."

"Mr. Rutherford's?" demanded Emma, rather tremulously.

"By no means," he interposed, with a head-shake; "Esdaile is *the* squire, Rutherford *a* squire only. Quite a different matter. I can't explain why, except that it is so. We are Medes and Persians in Garwood. We don't alter, we don't reason. Is a thing so, that's enough for us. Has a thing been, it ought to abide to all eternity."

"You are very wicked and satirical," laughed Emma; "is it not because the Rutherfords have been only here a few generations?"

"Are you related to them in any way?" hazarded Bramley.

"Related!" echoed Emma, much amused. "Why do you ask? do I remind you at

all of any of them?" she added rather mischievously.

"Perhaps a swan reminds me of an elephant," retorted Bramley, in mock gravity. "But I won't press you further on this point just now."

"Perhaps it does," said Emma, trying to look unconscious.

"Let us return to the pony," proposed Bramley, re-arranging the wraps; "well, that beast's importance is this. Mr. Esdaile is a centaur."

"Don't be absurd."

"That animal is part and parcel of Mr. Esdaile's personal identity."

"You delight in puzzling me," she protested.

"Literal fact," he insisted, with a little touch of emphasis on her wrist. "I have no time to explain, for here comes the curate."

"Reading a book," suggested Miss Klein, "with his trowsers turned up. He seems rather afraid of the mud. What tight glossy boots!"

"Exactly," he agreed; "meek and slim in a high waistcoat."

"He is bowing, I think," observed Emma. "How smart and spruce he is."

"The church is very obsequious to the land in these northern latitudes," whispered Bramley, bending down.

"And you are the land?"

"Assuredly; don't I look the character?" asked Bramley, repeating his touch on her hand.

Emma made no verbal reply, but how she wished that her kid gloves were a little newer. How tiresome it was, that one of them had become unsewn just above the thumb.

"He is a dapper young man," said Bramley, resuming comment upon the curate, "with a mellow voice and an occasional lisp. Hisname is Wing. The only pity is, that he will look as if a pack of hounds were in full cry after him."

"Do we come to church at Garwood?" demanded Emma.

"Speaking," he replied, "I presume, of yourself and the Rutherfords as one social

firm—I may reply without hesitation ‘we’ do.”

“And you go there also?” she questioned.

“Always—in the country,” returned Bramley. “Why do you ask?”

“I was only thinking,” she stammered; “but there—it does not signify one bit! What a lovely hedge all full of dog-roses and bramble flowers!” she broke off suddenly.

“Pardon me,” smiled Bramley, “I am glutted with hedges as I am gorged with alderneys. But I should like to know what was in your mind just now.”

“No, I really cannot tell you,” she protested, colouring.

“Then,” he pleaded, with a change of manner, “you will make me feel very awkward and wretched if you conclude so abruptly, and refuse me the reason of your sudden diversion to dog-roses. If you persist in silence, I shall certainly imagine I have done or said something to offend you.”

“Well, then,” she murmured, after a

pause of irresolution, "I will end where I broke off. I would rather speak out my foolish thought than leave you with such an impression."

"Now do tell me, that's a darl—kind person," entreated Bramley.

"I was only pondering," she sighed, studiously avoiding the glance of her companion, "how strangely life is arranged; the nice people come across one for an hour, and then disappear for ever, the hateful people recur in one's existence till the end of the chapter."

"Fully conceded," smiled Bramley; "and now, please, give me the special application of this as regards ourselves."

"I meant," she explained, with evident reluctance, "that, in a few minutes, you will have set me down at Kidston Park gates. You have shewn me to-day, as an utter stranger, no ordinary kindness and good-nature. I am very grateful, but likely enough I shall never see you again. While the Rutherfords, who are neither of them, it seems, greatly interesting, will be part and parcel of my daily existence for months. So

I thought of Garwood Church, where, even if we did not speak, I might see some one that had been kind to me. And—I was very silly—There, you have my worthless reflections in their full inanity !”

“You are the best missionary,” he whispered, bending over her, and this time actually imprisoning the faded glove for a second in his protecting grasp, “that ever quickened an unwilling church-goer. As it is, Wing and my tenants would be so exercised if I did not appear, and there would be such a clatter about it over Garwood tea-tables, that, graceless dog as I am, I appear like clock-work.”

“I think,” she returned evasively, “that a country life makes a young man much better than a town one.”

“Should you,” interposed Bramley, ignoring purposely her wish to divert their conversation to generalities, “be very much offended, if I asked you to be so nice and good as to tell me, whom I have been so fortunate in—hem—accidentally helping to her destination ?”

“I do not like telling you,” said his

companion, looking down, and trifling with her parasol ; " perhaps you may get angry, as the old station-woman did, and say, that I have gained my drive on false pretences."

" Come," he continued, spelling her looks, " I believe you have been in the plot with my aunt, the whole time. This is too bad !"

" With your aunt," returned Emma, amazedly ; " plotting with your aunt !"

" Certainly," cried Bramley, with a burst of merriment, " she is my aunt as well as yours. Have I guessed rightly ? If so we are certainly cousins."

And here Bramley pulled his horses to their slowest possible trot, as if to postpone the period of their separation.

" For Heaven's sake !" cried Emma, with an expression of dismay, " for whom in the wide world have you mistaken me ?"

" You wish," laughed Bramley, stroking his beard, " to keep me longer in suspense ; but listen, Miss Mischievous, my cousin-in-law (I coin the relationship), out of your

own lips, I am able to convict you, and unmask your deception."

"Indeed, indeed,"—interposed Emma, with increased bewilderment.

"Not a word," interrupted Bramley with mock gravity, "I am your judge—for the nonce—and you are the culprit. Attend to question one. Are you bound on a visit to Kidston Manor,—yes or no?"

"Well, yes," agreed Emma, reluctantly, "in one sense I suppose it is a visit—certainly, though Mrs. Rutherford might be angry if I represented myself in the light of a visitor."

"She certainly would," threw in Bramley, with a nod, "it is rather too cold a word decidedly. Now, shall I guess your name since you refuse to tell it me?"

"You have never heard it, Mr. Bramley."

"Receive the contrary, Miss Caroline Rutherford."

"Oh, dear me!" returned Emma, nearly crying, "what a dreadful thing this is! I am no such person."

"Are you not Mrs. Rutherford's niece?"

“ I’m only Mrs. Rutherford’s new governess !”

Bramley did the very best thing he could do, he burst into a hearty fit of merriment at his own mistake, and then turning to Emma said slyly without the slightest change in his manner,—

“ Then that old lady we left behind at the station must have been the niece, for this train the niece was certainly to come by.”

This facetious remark quite set Emma again at her ease, and she could now join his laughter at his mistake in her identity.

“ Then you came on purpose to Garwood Station after all ?” inferred Emma, putting a good face on the matter.

“ Ah, so you have found me out there,” he returned, with a meaning smile ; “ I confess that Mrs. Rutherford, my aunt-in-law, told me off to the agreeable duty of smoothing her niece’s journey between the station and the manor.”

“ But the porter surely told me,” said Emma, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, “ that you only drove up to enquire for

brown-paper parcels, and that he, the porter, had suggested you should take me on instead of a parcel."

"Jack," explained Gilbert, in deferential confidence, "is a most transparent idiot. You can pick his brains and make him say exactly what you require. So, till I had formed my own conclusions on this unknown niece, I preferred to remain in the background; and so I allowed Jack to imagine that he had managed the whole affair."

"It has been the oddest mistake," mused Emma, with a touch of sadness in her voice; "I fear that Mrs. Rutherford will feel convinced, that I wished to pass myself off as her relative, and that this has been all my fault and doing. Oh, dear me, how awkward it will be."

"Let us inaugurate a conspiracy," suggested Bramley, leaning towards her till he could whisper closely at her ear. "Let us tell Mrs. Rutherford nothing whatever about the mistake. I fear her black looks fully as much as you do."

"Perhaps it might be best," agreed

Emma, relieved, yet she said it with a certain reluctance, and as a choice of evils.

"And you now will tell me your name?" persisted Bramley, in a low and earnest voice, "before we separate? This has been such a charming error for me, and if you had been Miss Rutherford, we could not have got on better than we have done, no, nor probably one quarter so well."

"You are welcome to my poor name," answered Emma with her eyes down-cast. "It is only Emma Klein, I am not a county family, and, perhaps, some folks would say not even a lady."

"Of which number," interposed Bramley, gallantly, "I shall never be one. Sick to death of starch and ceremony, of introductions to feminine automatons of the purest Cropshire lineage; do let me say, that it does one positive good to meet a person who can be at the same time lady-like, charming, and unaffected."

Emma's colour deepened as she listened. Did no warning vision of Julia Bellamy, and her allegory of the old hen, flit across

Emma's mental vision, as her cheek changed, and her eyelids' fringes fell.

"You are offended?" said Bramley, hurriedly, in the succeeding silence. "I am such a blunt impetuous fellow."

"N-no," replied Emma at last, drawing a long breath; "are we near Kidston?"

"See," pointed Bramley, with a sigh, "the ogre's castle itself. Here are the portals! on one ramps a stone griffin, on the other a variety of the genus cockatrice. These beasts are set up to frighten the neighbours when they come to dinner."

"And here I must get down," nodded Emma, resolutely.

"Come," proposed Bramley, between joke and earnest, "let us drive back together to the station, and telegraph for the missing niece. It would be only civil and very nice; though, I own, that young lady's substitute has wholly consoled me for her disappearance."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Emma, her confusion contending with her amusement; "you must, please, set me down at once."

"On one condition," reluctantly agreed

Bramley, abruptly stopping his phaeton ; "that your promise to let me show you a glow-worm is scrupulously carried out on some future opportunity."

"No promise," laughed Emma, "and if a promise, wholly void now ; inasmuch as you extorted it from the supposed Miss Rutherford, and you will have to claim it from me, a much humbler personage."

"Look here, Miss Emma," he remonstrated with a handsome glow upon his face, "when Miss Rutherford arrives, I will not move an inch to show her even a tadpole."

"And I say for the third time, I must get out," and this time Emma was really permitted to alight. "You have been very good-natured, Mr. Bramley, to me to-day," she took courage to say, looking up as he leant out of his vehicle at parting to press her hand.

"I won't tell you what you have been," said Bramley, dropping his voice ; "but I think you can guess my thoughts, Miss Emma."

A flick of his whip, and Gilbert Bramley

passed away; Emma Klein remained in the road alone, before the gaunt iron gates of Kidston Manor, with her heart beating fiercely in her ears.





CHAPTER V.

A FRIGID RECEPTION.

WHILE the steeds of Gilbert Bramley were lessening the distance between Emma Klein and the seat of the Cropshire banker, Basset himself had risen from his normally voluminous correspondence to discuss the coming arrivals with his spouse.

"I need hardly remind you," he began, referring to a pencil memorandum, "that my niece is due to-day. Have you thought it expedient to meet her at the station?"

"Hem," replied Harriet, biting her lip, "that is provided for. I must put her into the blue room."

"She cannot resemble my brother

much," observed the banker, staring at vacancy, with his hands locked behind him. "Had she been Gerrard in petticoats, we might have invited her here in vain till Domesday."

"Girls," remarked Harriet, with a curl of the lip, "will put up with nearly everything, to see society and obtain an outing."

"That is perfectly correct," affirmed the banker, crooning a fragmentary variation of the "Old Hundred;" "yet I am pleased to find that Gerrard has transmitted none of his pig-headedness to the second generation."

"I only fear," cautioned Harriet with a toss of her head, "lest, after all, Miss Caroline should turn out wholly unpresentable. That she will require a completely new outfit, like a colonial emigrant, I fully expect. I hope she will not have coarse hands and red elbows. One never knows what menial work she may not have done in your brother's hand-to-mouth existence."

"On mature reflection," suggested the banker, watching the effect of his observation upon his wife, "I should say nothing

at present to this girl about her—expectations.”

Harriet had no hesitation upon that point, and wondered that her husband had rated her intelligence so low as to deem any such caution necessary.

“It would be a charity,” resumed the capitalist, with a self-satisfied cadence upon the cardinal virtue, “to give this poor girl one or two opportunities, during her stay, of making acquaintance with the eligible young men of this neighbourhood. Hah!”

“Take care,” returned his wife with ominous vivacity, “that she is not keeping company, as they call it, already, with some dreadful retail person in the suburbs. This kind of girl has usually ‘an affair’ on hand.”

“If so,” said the mill-owner in a straightforward, sledge-hammer way, “she can be easily extricated at any time. Hem! I should say, now, that a mere hint of her future position would — Eh, my dear?”

“Certainly,” coincided Mrs. Rutherford, slowly nodding her head, “I quite take

you. Some such intimation might—bring her to her senses. There is Gilbert Bramley, now.”

“You mean as a possible suitor,” pondered the banker, as he stroked his chin. “Gilbert is thoughtless—very. His last exposure was wholly unnecessary. It annoyed me. It might have been so easily avoided with a little—ha ! tact !”

“Boys will be boys,” rejoined his wife, with a shrug of resignation, “he will steady down after marriage.”

“The estates of Brendon and Kidston lie well together,” observed Rutherford, jingling the change in his trouser pockets. “Well, let Caroline Rutherford see Bramley. I make no opposition. Let these young people meet !”

“I suspect,” returned his wife in quiet triumph, consulting a watch tucked in at her waist-band, “that Caroline has done so already. I sent Gilbert to receive and drive her over.”

“That was well devised,” said the banker with a meaning smile of approval. “And now back to my letters ; but I have an

impression there was some other detail to remind you of, let me see."

"The governess," hazarded the lady, with a yawn.

"Exactly, the very thing," agreed Basset quickly, trifling with his albert-chain; "I suppose she must sleep somewhere. What have you done about it?"

"That is also arranged," returned Harriet with an air of languid fatigue, "as she was to come—though I still think she might have been for the present dispensed with—I put a good face on the matter, and took time by the forelock. You must know, that I mean to be very kind to this governess."

"Let her receive," nodded the banker with emphatic unction, "all reasonable consideration. But allow me to observe, that any indulgence, which is likely to obliterate in her mind the broad line of demarcation between employers and employed—may prove in the end, false kindness."

"Quite so," cried Harriet with easy assent, "I know where to stop. But, regarding Miss Klein's accommodation, I

was about to tell you how it was arranged. The governess goes into the upper lumber-room. I had it cleared out yesterday, and a very good job we made of the clearance, while you were at Blackwater. I found that, by judicious packing, all its contents could be stowed into a contiguous attic. I compared, side by side, some of the old furniture out of each repository, in order to ascertain by its condition the relative dampness of each room. Beyond question, the upper lumber-room requires airing most, so I ordered that room to be got ready."

"It will do nicely," said the banker, with a grunt, "and the number of our guest-chambers will remain undiminished; another advantage."

"My good man," protested his wife, petulantly, "think of the risk to paper and carpets; besides, I never dreamt of putting Miss Klein in a company-room."

"She dines at our luncheon," said Basset, rising to go, and spreading out a large yellow silk handkerchief like a sail, in his progress.

"Naturally," echoed Harriet, with a

spice of petulance ; " it is never otherwise, except in the middle-class."

" Here is one arrival," interposed the banker, raising his finger, as the door-bell timidly rang. " Which say you, my dear, niece or governess ?"

" Governess !" decided the lady, with contemptuous emphasis ; " I trust no Rutherford would ring such a sneaking peal as that ! It is a very suitable ring for a governess, and shows that, very properly, she feels her position."

Harriet was soon corroborated by a melancholy gentleman in black, who arrived to announce that the governess waited below, but there was evident protest in his looks at having to carry up the message.

" Then I will leave you, my dear," sniffed the banker, withdrawing, " to receive this young person."

" I mean to be very kind to her," reiterated the mistress of her house, reclining in an easy attitude.

Emma Klein was ushered in fairly self-possessed. Certainly, the sight of Mrs.

Rutherford, leaning indolently back in an ocean of flounces on a blue satin ottoman, was not reassuring.

"The governess, Miss Klein, is it not?" said Harriet, languidly. "I hope your journey has not been fatiguing."

Emma, rather nettled by this impassive reception, could not repress a momentary flush.

"Seems a high-tempered girl," commented inwardly the banker's wife, eyeing Emma leisurely, and looking her over with extreme deliberation.

"It was a little tiring," allowed Emma, with a diffident sigh.

"Won't you sit down?" suggested Harriet, waving her hand, after a pause.

Emma looked as if this permission had not been accorded by any means too speedily.

"You seem easily tired," rejoined the mistress, in no very gratified accents. "You will find that a disadvantage in your tutorial duties."

"I am not strong," pursued Emma, reddening afresh; "and I had a long delay at

Garwood Station, owing, I presume, to some error about my being met."

"Did you order any fly?" returned Mrs. Rutherford, carelessly; "if you did, it ought to have awaited you."

"Oh, none," replied Emma, confusedly; "I only thought that as you knew my train, that perhaps—"

"Mr. Rutherford," explained the mistress, blandly, "makes it a rule never to send except for guests or relatives."

This principle was enunciated, as if it had been a most beautiful and touching trait in the banker.

"Then," said Emma, controlling herself with an effort, "the mistake was entirely mine in expecting common—" and here she paused.

"Pray conclude your remark," suggested Mrs. Rutherford, in a freezing tone, and with a cold inclination of the head.

"I had rather not," returned Emma, nearly crying; "may I go up to my room? I am tired—unwell."

"Certainly," said the ex-barmaid, with icy condescension; "but, I fear, you will

never be strong enough for the place, if so very little upsets you. On details of study, I will see you in the morning. Meantime, mind, that I allow no cups of tea in bedrooms ; and I venture to hope, that you will give as little trouble as possible to the other servants."

The melancholy cat-footed gentleman having once more arrived at this juncture, it was intimated to Emma by a wave of the hand, and a slight nod, that she might consider herself as dismissed and done with for the present.

Now, the cat-footed one, though he condescended, under protest, to answer the drawing-room bell (which indeed was nearly his whole occupation in life, except looking generally beautiful), did not feel it incumbent upon himself to conduct a mere governess further in the direction of her apartment, than the end of the first passage on the drawing-room story. For here that gentleman, with the nice appreciation of the fitness of things, for which upper servants are remarkable, conceived his department to end and terminate.

So he very curtly left Emma Klein alone in the corridor, muttering carelessly and by no means hopefully, that he would endeavour to send up some one *presently* to show her the way. The term italicized received in all respects a liberal interpretation. The servants' hall conclave unanimously resolved, that no one could, without derogation, shew the new governess her room, except the third housemaid. This fact having been duly and with some difficulty impressed upon that trebly subordinate lady, she did not feel it necessary to abridge her tea, then current, for so trivial an errand.

So Emma strayed about the passage forsaken and unheeded for a considerable lapse of time. During which she could not help contrasting her desertion in Kidston corridor with her drive from Garwood Station. Now, not one of these insolent overfed servants would move a step to aid her. Then, a young man, well-born and decidedly handsome, seemed to care very much, that a poor little forlorn governess, should think him agreeable and nice. The

term of Emma's solitude plainly depended upon the capacity of the third housemaid for imbibing tea and assimilating buttered toast. But the unforeseen appearance of a girl, swinging her arms and singing at the end of the passage, brought a speedier release.

Emma Klein at once pounced upon the songstress as lawful prize ; and, hailing her as her future pupil, demanded an instant "safe conduct" to the scene of their educational labours.

"My future pupil," said Emma, kissing the girl ; "I feel sure we shall get on together. This way, dear, is it ? Tell me your name, love ?"

"My name is Bramley," answered the child, with perfect gravity, eagerly perusing her new teacher from head to foot, inch by inch.

Emma repressed a smile.

"That can hardly be. I mean your Christian name."

"That is Jessie," returned her pupil, opening her great child-eyes to their utmost. "You are shorter than old

Miss Maggs, and, oh dear! not near so stout."

"My predecessor?" hazarded Emma, taking Jessie's fingers into hers; "well, I hope you will like me as well as Miss Maggs."

"I did not like her at all," observed Jessie, with the utmost candour; "she was a 'daily,' and came here from Blackwater twice a week, and—you don't take snuff, Miss Klein?"

Emma repudiated the idea with a little cry of horror.

"She did," said Jessie, confidentially; "I am glad you don't. She told me never to mention it. She has been sent away, so I may tell now, I suppose."

"Dear me!" said Emma, quite at a loss whether to denounce or ignore this habit in her predecessor. "Dear me, Jessie—hem! what did Miss Maggs teach you?"

"She taught me," explained Jessie, in perfect good faith, "nearly everything, but I learnt hardly anything. She said, she knew all subjects equally well. She was

very cheap, mamma thought, and my nursery-maid Susan said, very nasty."

"Hem!" said Emma, stifling her merri-ment, and endeavouring to look serious; "and why did Miss Maggs discontinue her lessons?"

"I got her sent away through chattering," pursued Jessie, with a twinge of remorse and a rueful face; "I told a party at dessert, that governesses didn't know everything, because Miss Maggs had looked for *Terra firma* ever so long upon the map, and had never been able to find it yet."

"So Miss Maggs was dismissed?" inferred Emma, cheerfully. "I begin to suspect that her knowledge on all subjects must, as she said, have been tolerably equal."

"Now this is where you are to sleep," explained her pupil, pushing a door ajar and craning inside timidly. "We used to keep old furniture in here, and such a many mottled spiders. The bed came in yesterday from the stables. It was old Zachary, the helper's bed."

"Ah," said Emma, shuddering, "very nice indeed."

"The school-room is beyond," went on Jessie, vivaciously; "it used to be the loft, and when poor Neptune was ill, he was usually shut up there. We could not send him, you know, being a house-dog, to the cold stables. Though, I suppose, he will have to go there now, poor thing; unless you would not mind his being ill in our schoolroom; and, indeed, I should not, if you didn't."

"Unless," interposed Emma, with a spice of sarcasm, "they send me on such occasions to the stables to make room for the invalid dog."

"That would be only if Neptune were very—very bad," replied Jessie, on whom the irony of the remark had alighted quite harmlessly.

"Will you introduce me to Neptune?" observed Emma, turning it off.

"Yes," nodded Jessie, gravely, "he is a very nice person. Are you at all lame, Miss Klein?" with a glance at her boot-tips.

"My dear child, the questions you ask!" returned Emma, with a silvery laugh; "lame, no; why should you expect me to be crippled?"

"Because, whisper," said Jessie, on tip-toe at Emma's ear, "Miss Maggs said she had more trouble with her corns than any other woman in England. She called herself a martyr."

"I don't regret Miss Maggs!" exclaimed Emma, impulsively. "She did not leave one instant too soon!"

"I shall like you better than her," spoke Jessie, with a steady kind of look; "I am almost sure I shall, but it will depend a great deal upon what Susan, my nursery-maid, thinks of you."

And the governess and her new charge entered the Kidston schoolroom hand-in-hand.





CHAPTER VI.

A BROKEN SEAL AND A SHAKEN SPANIEL.

IT is a matter of creed with the present chronicler, that all married men are not of necessity hen-pecked. But, he believes, that all single men of middle age, who keep house with female relatives, are by some immutable and inevitable social law reduced to that deplorable condition.

Descending from generals to one particular instance. Here was Mr. Esdaile of Garwood, a bachelor of forty-three, and Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile, the widow of a naval lieutenant, the squire's brother, keeping house for her kinsman. Therefore, Mr. Esdaile of Garwood, could in many

household matters hardly call his hand his own.

The family at the Priory would be incomplete, if we omitted to mention Mrs. Wilfred's daughter, Violet Esdaile. A very pretty girl of twenty, with rippling light brown hair, a fresh colour, deep gray eyes, a mouth like a rose-bud, and the daintiest of figures that ever tripped along a country lane; when only a few wild flowers were come to bloom, and the birds were thinking about their broods.

But, if the daughter recalled the fragile harebell, her mother seemed rather to bring back the more glaring dyes of the poppy, or the abounding expansion of the peony. For Mrs. Wilfred reminded us of those comely but rather too extensive ladies on the canvasses of Titian. Her prevailing tints were pink and yellow. She was a dame of bountiful curves and massive outline. She wore her hair in an untidy ripple, suggestive of coming indoors from a high wind. She was the daughter of an English official at Malta, and for some years had been one of the few nice-looking

English girls on that island. Consequently, as each of her Majesty's ships put into harbour, she received offers of marriage from many of the midshipmen on board. This could not go on for ever, so one of the most eligible of these, Wilfred Esdaile, ended by carrying off the fair Anglo-Maltese to the colder latitudes of Cropshire.

Wilfred had married on his pay, and his slender portion as a cadet of the Esdaile family. He died after a few years of matrimony, leaving his widow and infant daughter badly enough provided for. So Harvey Esdaile offered them refuge at Garwood, and Mrs. Wilfred had been at anchor there ever since.

One morning, soon after Emma Klein's arrival at Kidston, Mrs. Wilfred made this observation to her daughter Violet in the drawing-room at Garwood Priory.

"It is really surprising what curious people seem to write to your Uncle Harvey."

It is necessary to explain that when the post came in, as it had just done, at the

Priory, everyone's letters were laid out for public inspection on a certain marble slab, opposite the front door. Here they remained till claimed by their respective owners. This process, as regarded letters, being rather analogous to that of the Morgue as respecting bodies. A healthy and amusing occupation was thus afforded to the inmates of the house in speculating upon the postmarks, hand-writing, and general appearance of each other's correspondence. At this pastime the last claimant of his or her news fared always the worst. Let us remember that in the country people have really so much time.

"Some most unaccountable correspondent," echoed Mrs. Wilfred, after renewed inspection, this time slightly varying her previous remark.

She had impounded the letter from the family Morgue-slab, and was now turning it slowly over.

"It is no concern of ours, mamma, dear," suggested Violet, with a short laugh, who was engaged in copying a water-colour landscape.

"I don't know that," returned Mrs. Wilfred, nodding gravely, "men are such noodles, that they require constant protection and looking after. How poor Harvey would be preyed upon, if I did not weary myself out in his interests, late and early, no one knows ! I shall reap no credit for my care, but the satisfaction of an approving conscience is something, after all ; which brings me back to your uncle's suspicious correspondent."

"Please, mamma," said Violet, rising, paint-brush in hand, "do let me replace that letter in the entrance-hall. Consider, if uncle were to return suddenly from the home-farm."

"A female hand," mused Mrs. Wilfred, contemptuously ; "and, I will be bound, a female beggar to guide it. A London post-mark, and '16, Arabian Crescent,' in blue Gothic letters, on the flap of the envelope ! I will crescent her !" concluded the widow, with some anger, but greater vagueness of intention.

"Do let me take it back," pleaded Violet, pointing her brush with her lips.

A light seemed to strike Mrs. Wilfred.

"Run up, dear, to the green bed-room, and bring me down that old Court Guide in the little book-case there."

"Will you promise," stipulated Violet, unwillingly moving towards the door, "that you restore the letter, as soon as you have referred to this volume?"

"Oh, dear, yes," agreed the widow, with a gesture of impatience.

Violet soon returned, with a pretty heightened colour, from her scamper up a formidable flight of staircases.

"It's a very old one, mamma," she panted with a smile.

"Streets," muttered Mrs. Wilfred, searching with a rapid forefinger; "Arundel—Arlington—Argyll—Arabian—one, eight sixteen.—Gracious heavens!"

With this explanation, Mrs. Wilfred abruptly dropped the Court Guide. Had she been a man, she would have relieved her feelings by a low whistle; being a lady, she lapsed into mute and rigid astonishment.

"My dearest mother!" exclaimed Violet,

rushing to her assistance, and bending over the chair; "you are surely unwell. Do tell me what to do! Shall I run for the salts, or slap your palms, or fetch the water-bottle from the dining-room?"

"Julius Bellamy," muttered Mrs. Wilfred, throwing her head back; "snake!"

"Why is Mr. Julius Bellamy a snake?" pressed Violet, kneeling beside her mother.

"He can't be one; he is dead. Don't be stupid!"

"Do explain."

"His daughter—a most designing woman—"

"Well, mamma?"

"Tried," continued Mrs. Wilfred, shedding a few tears, and using her handkerchief rather more than necessary, "to entrap poor dear Harvey, when he was quite a young man. He is not over-wise even now, and then it must have been—Lord help him! He didn't want *her*" (with an angry head-shake)—"not he! But she pestered his life out, until he was forced to notice her out of mere civility. And then Harvey came to his senses, and broke it

off. Something about a scamp of a cousin whom she flirted with—even too much for meek Harvey's endurance. And the cousin fell into debt, and fled the country. So she got neither scamp nor Harvey, and remains an old maid to this day, and serve her richly right."

"Quite a romance!" observed Violet, breaking into an interested smile.

"I should never," resumed Mrs. Wilfred, in a melancholy voice, "have believed it possible, even for Miss Bellamy, to have had the audacity to address a written communication to your uncle. There are, however, I regret to say, no limits to brazenness. It becomes, consequently, my duty to prepare Harvey for the shock of receiving this, which will, I know, move him deeply. Therefore, Violet, I will go upstairs, put on my walking things, and meet your uncle. I shall deliver this to him personally. I must go alone; your presence would embarrass him."

So Mrs. Wilfred ascended alone to her room, carrying the letter in one hand, and quivering with suppressed curiosity. Ar-

riving here, she at once double-locked her chamber-door ; and advancing to the looking-glass, contemplated for a few moments her own personal reflection. Had the house been on fire, we are inclined to believe, that Mrs. Wilfred would hardly have foregone this inspection ; which even her eagerness respecting Miss Bellamy's letter could not induce her to postpone.

This done, Mrs. Wilfred told herself, that it clearly behoved her, then and there, to take prompt measures to shield her easy-natured brother-in-law from the toils of an adventuress. Unaided by her own penetration, she feared, that Harvey, even after so many years, might relapse from the sober paths of celibacy, and fall a willing victim to an old and dangerous fascination. She managed to convince herself that, to avert a great calamity, it was lawful to employ a small amount of double-dealing. And, having reached this point, and spurred by an ungovernable impulse, Mrs. Wilfred did not, in vulgar parlance, make two bites at a cherry, but there and then deliberately opened the letter from Julia Bellamy to

Harvey Esdaile. Its contents rather inflamed than satiated Mrs. Wilfred's indomitable curiosity.

The letter ran to this effect :—

“ 16, Arabian Crescent, Bayswater,

“ Thursday, June 2, 1862.”

“ DEAR MR. ESDAILE,—

“ I resume my pen, after so many years of silence, with mingled feelings. To write to you is like shaking once more by the hand an old and esteemed friend. But the need which occasions this letter is painful and imperative. You have got my wretched secret in your keeping. Something connected with this, which I dare not even write, makes me desire to see you instantly. Your great kindness in the past emboldens me to impose a severe test upon your good-nature in the present. Could you come up at once to London and see me? I can only make you understand exactly how affairs are by word of mouth. Things are very black indeed with me, and your own safety may be involved in this—a common danger to us both. I dare not trust more

to paper. But, rest assured that I have, alas ! only too good a reason for wishing to warn you without delay.

“ Believe me, dear Mr. Esdaile,

“ Your ever grateful,

“ JULIA BELLAMY.”

“ And, upon my word,” commented Mrs. Wilfred, holding the open pages between her thumb and fore-finger, in an attitude of dainty disgust ; “ it is indeed lucky for you, Mr. Harvey, that I have managed to intercept this most precious document. There is a designing toad, if you like ! It is a pity your ‘ long years of silence ’ did not lengthen themselves out to a century of dumbness. As to what your wretched secret is, I would really rather not reflect. Well, well, who would have thought it of Harvey, the quietest soul upon earth ? Give him his spud and his pony, and the man is amused. I confess I was never more utterly dumb-founded. Poor fellow ; I feel convinced it was all her doing. These mercantile people have quite another standard to ours. Humph ! what a very un-

pleasant business ! Quite an old story now, but none the better for that reason. Fifty, too, if she is a day, and trying to snap up poor dear Harvey again—like a flirt in her first season ! The audacity ! And yet, I will warrant you, the goose would have posted off by to-morrow's express if this had reached him, which it won't. I have no patience with the men. They are so easily taken in. She 'dare not trust more to paper !' You have said, I am sure, quite enough ; but the pity was you ever used paper at all. However, silent you shall be, as far as Harvey is concerned ; and if you don't receive any reply, and have a spark of proper feeling left, I fancy that will quiet your restless pen, as regards Harvey, for ever and a day. There, I have no grain of doubt," concluded Mrs. Wilfred, with a resolute face and severe composure, "that I am perfectly justified in tearing this letter—and envelope—into the smallest of small shreds ; in pushing the fragments under my bedroom grate ; in lighting them with a wax match ; and in quietly watching them reduced to ashes."

All of which she did.

Then Mrs. Wilfred, feeling much relieved, dressed herself for a walk, and descended with quite an air of triumph to the drawing-room. Here she caused Violet to pack up her paint-box, and to array herself in analogous costume to her own. Then Mrs. Wilfred gave up the idea of seeking the squire towards the home-farm, and found she had several small purchases to make in the actual town of Garwood.

"Is Flora to come with us?" asked Violet, alluding to one of the lap-dog species, who was using all her arts of canine persuasion to be allowed to make a third on the expedition.

"She is such a snappish little spit-fire," doubted Mrs. Wilfred; "won't she run the sheep?"

"We shall not see any," pleaded Violet; "and Flora has promised me to be quite—quite good to-day."

So Flora was permitted to trot behind the two ladies.

Presently, they passed the Lodge-gates, and came out upon the turnpike road.

Here they encountered the Reverend Paul Wing, in company with an evident foreigner, carrying a camp-stool and a portfolio.

Wing took off his hat, and gave the ladies good day. The foreign gentleman waited, with the politeness of his nation, at the distance of some paces, while they conversed.

"And how," commenced Mrs. Wilfred, condescendingly, "is the parish getting on?"

"We are," returned Wing, after a moment's reflection, "extremely quiet. I may say we have been seldom more so. There is likely to be a change in the mistress of the school.—Luke Kemp has been dismissed the choir for drunkenness.—The little Griggs have got the chin-cough.—One of old Betty Magden's—hem—feet has swollen.—Let me see; I don't at the moment remember anything else fresh.—Oh, there is come down a new doctor over us—a great event in our small community. Ah, to be sure, I had forgotten him."

"That cannot be the gentleman," said Violet, under her voice, nodding towards

the personage, who stood apart, trifling with the camp-stool.

"By no means," replied Wing, faintly amused; "that is a foreign artist, of the name of Eyserbeck. A man of varied culture, who is staying for the moment at the 'Headless Woman,' on a sketching tour."

"Is he respectable?" enquired Mrs. Wilfred, furtively scrutinising the artist; "one really never knows with foreigners."

"That, my dear madam," rejoined the curate, hurriedly, "I know nothing about, one way or the other. He introduced himself this morning, to beg permission to draw the stone Crusader in Garwood Church chancel. He speaks excellent English, with some accent, which at times wholly disappears. Shall I introduce him? He would feel greatly honoured."

"N-no," decided Mrs. Wilfred, reflectively; "it would be wiser to learn a few more of his antecedents first."

"Quite so," said the curate, with a cough of deference.

"He must have been a fine man," whis-

pered Mrs. Wilfred to her daughter. "He has the lines of having been very good-looking."

"We ought really to step out," advised Violet, drawing a mud pattern with her umbrella, "if my uncle is to see anything of us at luncheon."

"By the way," resumed the curate, with his hand shyly placed before his mouth, "Mr. Eyserbeck is anxious to commence a series of studies in foliage. Some one had suggested your park to him as peculiarly adapted for this purpose. He represented to me that the children crowded round him a good deal on the high roads, but that he could not think of entering a private park without permission accorded by the owners."

"He seems a modest kind of man," surmised Mrs. Wilfred, with her usual penetration. "Well, let him sketch about the park by all means. Certainly, when all Garwood town assumes the right to stray in, without leave or licence, this is not much of a concession to your friend—"

"Not friend," corrected Wing, in a mild voice, and with respectful hesitation, "only my casual acquaintance."

"Let him sketch till doomsday in either case," said Mrs. Wilfred, with a confirmatory jerk of her head.

"I will convey," continued Wing, with his finger on his hat-brim, "your kind permission to Mr. Eyserbeck."

"Do so," explained Mrs. Wilfred, "and, if you like, catch us up again on our way into town."

So the ladies resumed their course to Garwood, while the curate joined the foreigner in an opposite direction. Violet possessed in common with the rest of her sex, the valuable faculty of seeing, when she chose, what was going on behind her. She therefore perceived Mr. Wing approach the artist, and address to him some inaudible communication. Thereupon, the foreigner nearly bent himself double, and laid the outspread fingers of one hand upon the region of his heart, to express, as she surmised, his effusive gratitude. He then executed an ornate flourish with his

hat in the direction of the retreating ladies, grasped Mr. Wing by the hand, re-shouldered his portfolio and camp-stool, and disappeared through the adjacent lodge-gates into Garwood park; there Mr. Wing parted from the artist, and, returning, put his own best clerical foot forwards, to overtake the ladies ahead.

"Oh, mamma," exclaimed Violet, with an incipient titter, "you cannot think how he is bowing and scraping after us."

"Don't look round, Violet, I insist," pursued her mother, sternly. "I daresay it is all right and proper in the country where he comes from. These foreigners are full of, what I call, outward observances."

"Well," returned Violet, with a sarcastic smile, "our Cropshire young men don't make that mistake. Example, Mr. Bramley."

"Mr. Bramley does very well," rebuked Mrs. Wilfred, curtly.

"I wonder," suggested Violet, with a twinkle in her soft eyes, "if the park

cows will run poor Mr. Eyserbeck. Our Cropshire cattle find out a stranger ruthlessly soon."

"Had you not better tie up Flora," said Mrs. Wilfred, picking her way, "before we reach the town?"

"The poor dear has been so good," expostulated Violet, in a pitying voice. "Here comes Mr. Wing, catching us up."

"Well," smiled Mrs. Esdaile, "what report from our artistic pilgrim?"

"He is deeply grateful," assured the curate, rather out of breath.

"Tell me our new doctor's name?" reminded Violet.

"Lapworth—Edgar Lapworth," returned Wing. "I have seen him once on his rounds. He has taken his predecessor's horse and gig at a valuation, and drives about as if he was born in the vehicle."

"I trust he is not too young," suggested Mrs. Wilfred.

"Looks a mere boy," said Wing, perfectly unconscious that his own appearance was far from patriarchal.

"Dear, dear," fussed Mrs. Wilfred, "I hope he will be the death of nobody. So here we are in Garwood town at last. Violet, keep an eye on that dog—sheep!"

They had turned a corner suddenly in the High Street upon a colony of sheep, who were reposing upon their travels before the "Headless Woman," while the drovers in charge were refreshing themselves inside. The hinds had delegated their functions to a gaunt ragged lurcher, with a stump of a tail, who kept watch and ward over the flock in their absence.

The unlucky Flora could not resist so tempting an opportunity of mischief, so she dashed without further preface into the heart of the halting drove, to scatter her enemies with wild effect. Here she was incontinently pinned to the ground by one sure and rapid dart of the lurcher in charge. Mrs. Wilfred's warning came some seconds too late, and Violet at once perceived, that the life of her favourite was in considerable jeopardy, as the little spaniel seemed only a mouthful in the capacious jaws of the sheep-dog.

"O please, save her, Mr. Wing!" shrieked Violet, wringing her hands.

"My dear young lady," faltered the curate, waving feebly his umbrella, and at the same time backing into an ironmonger's shop, "that lurcher is a very ugly animal! Shoo! shoo!"

"Will nobody help me?" cried Violet, rushing in her extremity into the ironmonger's for assistance; "that nasty dog is worrying my poor darling before my face."

In the shop sat a young man and an elderly lady in weeds. She had just bought a dozen patty pans, he was selecting from a bundle of toasting forks.

"Lord bless me!" ejaculated the elderly lady, turning pale and grasping the counter, "police!"

The young man, however, rushed out into the road with his bundle of toasting-forks, and flying to Flora's rescue, proceeded at once to belabour and poke alternately, with this improvised means of offence, the ragged back and head of the lurcher. After a brief but severe struggle,

the sheep-dog relinquished his hold and retreated growling. The young man picked up Flora, now much too terrified to move, and carried her back to Violet, who received her with tears of gratitude. Thanks to the thick silky hair which surrounded her spaniel's neck, and prevented the lurcher's teeth from penetrating much in the actual flesh, the little animal did not seem seriously damaged.

"Well," said Mrs. Raymond, from the ironmonger's steps, whom our readers will doubtless have recognised, "the upshot of this dog-worrying is, that Philip will have to pay for at least a dozen toasting-forks."

Meantime, Flora was being inspected by a sympathetic group, consisting of Violet, Mrs. Wilfred, and the curate.

Philip took off his hat and was about to retire.

"Pray do not leave us yet," said Mrs. Esdaile, with extreme politeness; "we are, I am sure, greatly obliged to you."

"And can never thank you enough," murmured Violet with fervour, repeatedly

kissing the trembling little creature which she held.

"A most trivial service," protested Philip, in some confusion.

"Who is he?" whispered Mrs. Wilfred, nudging the curate.

"Strange to say," said Wing, softly in the widow's ear, "I have not the remotest notion."

"Ask him," from Mrs. Wilfred, in a stage aside.

Mr. Wing stepped forward.

"Hem, pardon me," he began, addressing Philip, and trifling with his watch-chain, "if in my capacity, as clergyman of this parish, I venture to enquire whether you are a resident here? Hem!"

Mrs. Raymond had edged herself nearer and nearer during the curate's apologetic enquiry. So, at its conclusion, she put her son on one side, and replied in person.

"We are at present residing," she simpered, speaking through Mr. Wing at the Garwood Priory ladies, "over the magazine of one of the leading tradesmen of this town. This is far from being what I have,

up to this time, been accustomed to ; in the Terrace we came from, there were, I assure you, with one exception, only private houses ; and if some did take in lodgers, they did it genteelly by advertisement, for you could never see a card——”

“ My dear mother,” said Philip, drawing her back, “ allow me to explain.”

“ I regret,” observed Mr. Wing, mildly, “ that I am unable quite to follow the lady’s remarks.”

Mrs. Wilfred cast a rapid look of amusement towards her daughter.

“ My name is Raymond,” pursued Philip ; “ I have lately come to Garwood, as an attorney’s clerk.”

“ Philip !” remonstrated Mrs. Raymond, “ Philip !”

Violet raised her pretty eyes from the maimed spaniel, with just a tinge of disappointment in their gray depths.

“ Related to Mr. Esdaile’s lawyer,” presumed Mrs. Wilfred, in a voice of gracious patronage.

“ Nephew,” explained Philip, modestly.

“ I am sure,” said Violet, interposing

with a faint blush, "Mr. Esdaile will call and thank you personally. He is as fond of Flora as I am, though he will never own to the fact."

"I trust," bowed Philip, reddening also on his part, "that Mr. Esdaile will not dream of giving himself that unnecessary trouble. You regard this slight, this" (with a glance at his weapons) "almost ridiculous service, in far too serious a light."

"But that was such a terrific dog," urged Violet, with a dainty shudder.

"Poor fellow," he was only doing his duty," reasoned Philip, with a softened manner; "I fear your little pet there was clearly in the wrong."

"Flora is infallible," insisted Violet, with an engaging shadow of displeasure on her lips, which ended in a smile for Flora's rescuer. "Besides, it is not the custom to tell disagreeable truths to young ladies."

Mrs. Wilfred deemed it high time to interpose.

"Come, my dear; the squire must think we are lost, and will have the river drawn."

Violet hesitated.

"Could we not take Flora to the surgery, and have her examined by the new doctor?" she suggested dubiously.

"Impossible," decided Mrs. Wilfred, with a head-shake. "Nothing medical men are so tetchy about as being called in to animals. And we are not even acquainted yet with Mr.——"

"Lapworth," supplied the curate, hitching up his waistcoat.

"But I know him extremely well," proposed Philip, with a flush at his good fortune in being again useful. "Lapworth will do anything for me. Let me carry the dog across to him, and I will bring you back a report in ten minutes."

Violet's eyes beamed with gratitude. Philip wished the distance twice as long.

Flora was accordingly confided to Philip, who broke in upon Lapworth at his mid-day meal, with much raillery, that he, Philip, was bringing him his first genteel Garwood patient. Edgar made, in all good nature, the necessary inspection with promptness; and Philip rejoined the group before the "Headless Woman," with a most en-

couraging account of Flora's injuries. In transferring the spaniel to Violet's arms, Philip's hand for a moment rested against Violet's. It was only for a second ; but Philip's doom was sealed in that instant of time. He had risen that morning a contented attorney's clerk, and now, for many a long day, the gratitude of a pretty girl would make him curse his obscure destiny. How much better for him would it have been had he only saved the terrier of Miss Eavestaff, the grocer's daughter, where he lodged, than the spaniel of the young lady at the " Priory."





CHAPTER VII.

A CALL IN THE RAIN.

LUCAS RAYMOND sat in the front office drawing out a lease. Philip Raymond was copying a mortgage deed against time in the inner room. It was a dripping and dispiriting day. The rain came in great gushes and splashes against the office window panes. The High Street seemed a desert of drip and puddles.

Lucas leant back, and stretched himself luxuriously.

"This," he muttered, with a glance outside, "is the kind of weather for conveyancing. I get on with my work, and no neighbour runs in to pester me with trivial questions.

Ha ! this is really comfortable. I shall not be interrupted to-day ;” and he dipped his pen into the inkstand ; and, after a preliminary flourish, made another dash at the lease.

There is one lady out, however, in a waterproof cloak. Her umbrella hides her above entirely from view. On she comes, down the High Street, like a dripping black mushroom in motion, pauses at the brass plate of Raymond and Raymond, and rings impatiently, as people do who wish to get in out of the rain.

“ Lord bless me !” cried Lucas inside, making a blot as he started backwards in his chair, “ here is a client, after all.”

Hannah entered mysteriously, and, coming close to her master, said, in a low voice—

“ Are you engaged to Mrs. Rutherford ?”

“ Close that green baize door,” said Lucas, hurriedly.

Hannah, having thus excluded Philip at his mortgage, ushered Mrs. Rutherford in, and withdrew.

“ Why, you are wringing wet, Harriet !”

exclaimed Lucas, divesting the visitor of her waterproof.

"And yet I have only skirted the road," explained Mrs. Rutherford, shaking out her garment. "I left my carriage at Thornapple's."

"Urgent business, Harriet?" hazarded the lawyer, dubiously.

"So, so," replied the lady, with a nod; "rather unpleasant, but not very urgent."

"You have come in alone?" questioned Lucas, with a meaning glance.

"My daughter and niece," rejoined Harriet, drawing off her wet gloves, "await me at the library. They are turning the old novels over there."

"This is an unforeseen pleasure," observed the attorney, with an air of gallantry.

"So you did not expect me, Lucas," said the lady, sinking into one of the office chairs.

"You are always welcome, Mrs. Rutherford," returned Lucas, in perfect good faith, and looking really pleased at her visit.

"I suppose your clerk cannot hear us?" she said, moving a finger towards the closed green door. "You had no clerk at my last visit."

"I am growing old," rejoined Lucas, with a touch of sadness in his voice, "and have been obliged to take one. It is my nephew—a good lad. He can't hear, and will not even try to listen."

"Old, Lucas?" laughed the banker's wife. "You are in your prime, man."

"Face the truth, Harriet," insisted the lawyer; "at least, *you* need not compliment me."

"Well, I shall be gray also, soon enough," went on Mrs. Rutherford, in a bitter petulant tone. "It is worry, and not time, that ages one; and this morning's post has revived unpleasant associations."

"So you have very wisely brought me the letter," concluded Lucas, with quiet approval. "Is it uncle Joseph? It must be that soaking family pensioner of yours, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"Hush," said Mrs. Rutherford, nodding vehemently at her legal adviser; "you are

right enough there ; but, for goodness sake, speak lower——”

“ I tell you, we might be in Central Asia, as regards my clerk hearing us,” protested Lucas, with a shrug of his shoulders.

“ If there ever was a hopeless, drunken, neer-do-weel,” continued the lady, with an impatient shake of her handkerchief, “ it is this unlucky uncle of mine.”

“ He might,” reasoned the lawyer, scratching his eyebrow, “ perfectly well subsist upon the very fair allowance which I remit to him quarterly on your behalf.”

“ Out of my private means,” supplemented Mrs. Rutherford, in a querulous voice ; “ out of my clothes’ and pocket-money. The ungrateful viper !”

“ He wants more, I presume,” guessed Lucas, with a grunt. “ Let us see how the vagabond colours his application.”

“ Worse ! far worse !” lamented the lady, with a groan ; “ his creditors are about to levy an execution upon the old creature’s furniture for £200. How can he have got through half that sum, when he goes about in such rags ?”

"Send him fifty," advised Lucas, with a twitch of his shoulders, after a brief pause.

"Hem, I thought of twenty," coughed Mrs. Rutherford, behind her ungloved hand.

"Not enough, Harriet," interposed Lucas, with some decision ; "it won't prevent him being sold up."

"Then, please send fifty for me," she decided, in evident reluctance, and with no very gracious concession.

"It shall go. Anything else, Harriet, that I can execute for you?"

"I am anxious about Mr. Rutherford," she continued. "You cannot help me about that ; but it is a comfort, telling an old friend. I feel convinced he is overworking himself."

"Your husband's health is usually excellent," surmised Lucas, with no great sympathy in his tone.

"He is low, and out of sorts," explained the wife. "It may be body, it may be mind. I believe he is making a great deal of money ; but that will be a poor consolation, if he ruins his health."

"I regret to hear this, Harriet," a little more warmly, from Lucas.

"One is naturally anxious," emphasized Mrs. Rutherford, twirling her empty glove. "And my position would be greatly altered, if anything were to occur. One does not like turning out of a fine house for a chit of a girl—at a moment's notice."

"Naturally not," agreed the lawyer, with a rapid and stealthy glance of amusement at the banker's wife. "You allude to your niece. I did not know Kidston was entailed."

"I am not at liberty to enlighten you on that point," replied Mrs. Rutherford, in a tone which concluded and dismissed that topic, at any rate.

"Is your husband aware of your visit here to-day?" asked Lucas, after a pause.

"Certainly he is," returned Mrs. Rutherford, carelessly; "I mentioned at breakfast my intention of driving in here. I said that I was desirous of consulting you about my savings. I have informed Basset long ago that I am making a purse for—possible contingencies. As Bramley and the Esdailes employ you, it is natural I should

follow suit. Of our early acquaintance, he still, of course, has no suspicion."

"Consult me as often as you like, Harriet," spoke Lucas, with some feeling; "you bring a whiff of the old days in with you to this abode of dust and cobwebs. I see no female society but my housekeeper's. Now, Mrs. Armitage is well enough, but she is not everybody."

"She does not remember me," continued the visitor, between a question and an assertion. "I have tested her purposely. She has no remembrance of my face."

"How should she?" demanded Lucas, moodily; "did she ever see you—in those times?"

"Once."

"To be sure!" he exclaimed, with a light of recollection in his eyes. "I remember now all about it. She wanted something" (here he lowered his voice) "at the 'Crown and Sceptre,' and I gave her a few lines to you. I wonder you managed to bear her face so long in mind."

"It is a remarkable one," nodded Harriet, with an accession of gravity. "And then

she also came to our place under quite peculiar circumstances, which have stamped themselves indelibly upon my recollection."

"Which circumstances you never told me, Harriet," said the lawyer, with a twinge of long-forgotten jealousy.

"And never shall tell you," echoed the lady, with the utmost deliberation. "But I will inform you thus far, that Hannah frightened me nearly out of my seven senses, and made me take all sorts of unnecessary oaths, never to mention what I have done for her."

"Keep your secret, Harriet," observed Lucas, with a slow smile. "Hannah was a curious study then; and, I believe, just a little mad. However, long years of rest and regular hours, have cured her of all that, and she is now, for my purpose, invaluable."

"That was not an over bright period in my existence," observed the banker's wife, with a shudder.

"Nor of mine," coincided Lucas, gloomily biting a pen; "especially one evening,

about dusk, at old Samuel Michaelson's. Eh, Harriet?"

"When I refused you, Lucas," added Mrs. Rutherford, in a frank, unmoved manner.

"When you refused me," echoed Lucas, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"But we are fast friends again," said Harriet, a little archly.

"Aye, aye," muttered Lucas, rubbing his hands; "fast friends enough, Harriet. As long as a certain mouldy old lawyer remains plodding away at his parchments, one friend you will have in the world; and friends are none so common there, though there is no stint of acquaintances by the cart-load."

"I believe, Lucas," confessed his visitor, rather impetuously, "that I can talk to you with less restraint than I can to my husband. Before you, I need suppress nothing; with him, half my previous life must be a blank."

"Likely enough," agreed Lucas, in a thoughtful mood. "Do you not know that this provincial world of ours gives you out

as a haughty, dominant, arrogant woman ? I alone know differently."

"Is it likely," demanded the visitor, with a faint, uncomfortable laugh, "that I should be arrogant before you, Lucas Raymond, who know my humble beginnings?"

"You merely copy your husband's manner," said Lucas, with a cough of constraint. "Your pride is only skin-deep. As your position at Kidston obliges you to wear fine clothes, so you put on fine-lady manners. You do not feel quite native to your place, so you assume these artificialities in self-defence. That is how I read you, Harriet, and reconcile my intimate knowledge of your character with the jarring verdict of your neighbours round about."

"I do think," explained Harriet, reddening slightly, "that I take my cue too much from those I live with. There seems to me always an atmosphere of state and restraint at Kidston, which goads me into self-assertion. Here, I am as simple as a dairy-maid."

"You reflect external influences," said

Lucas, with a smile, "more than any woman whom I ever knew."

"Yet I refused you," reminded Harriet, with a demure look. "Your influence failed then to touch me."

"That was fate," returned the lawyer, with a shrug of resignation.

"We should never have got on together, Lucas," she added, earnestly. "I was selfish, luxurious, mercenary."

"Not a bit of it," said the attorney, cordially; "but it is needless to discuss that contingency now."

"And now I must go," observed the banker's wife, half playfully extending her hand. "The money must reach Joseph Behrends, mind."

"I pledge my word on its arrival," assured Lucas, with emphasis, and she departed in the rain.






CHAPTER VIII.

THE SQUIRE IS WARNED.

Emma Klein to Miss Julia Bellamy.

"Kidston, June 4th, 1862.

"MY KIND PATRONESS,—

 "I will reply in detail to each query in your nice letter. I need hardly say, how grateful I was to receive news of you. My life here is bearable enough, and the country air is making me daily stronger. My pupil is not more tiresome than pupils generally are. The master and mistress of the house are certainly neither pleasant nor cordial; but I see them so seldom, that this does not affect me greatly. Alto-

gether, I shall do very well, so dismiss from your mind all special anxiety on my account.

“I am luckier in one respect than most governesses: I get my afternoons to myself. Jessie, my pupil, drives with Mrs. Rutherford in the barouche, and I am left to my own devices. These generally assume the form of a brisk walk into Garwood. Here I can post my letters without having them overhauled by every Kidston domestic; then the shops, though they are few, amuse me, and many county rotables flock in every afternoon from sheer want of other occupation. I tell you all this, as you may wonder how I have found leisure to pick up my odds and ends of local news. I hardly know whether I shall find time to unpack all my budget in this letter, but I will give you one rather odd fragment of intelligence first.

“The person who met me on your doorstep, and who, I guessed, had come there to beg of you, is at Garwood village. He sketches daily in the Priory Park, which belongs to a Mr. Esdaile. I am told he is

a very clever artist, though eccentric ; he is, I need hardly tell you, of Prussian extraction.

“I have passed Mr. Eyserbeck more than once in the High Street, and I candidly confess, that on further inspection he has impressed me even less favourably, than during my momentary sight of him in your Crescent. He seems to lead an idle aimless life enough. I do not believe he works very hard even at his sketches. He gives himself out as a person of ample means, and is generally supposed to be a nobleman in his own country ; so, that if I ought to have said Count Eyserbeck, or Baron Eyserbeck, please correct me in your reply. He seems, in fine, the very last kind of man to have any points of contact with you, my dear Miss Bellamy. But, as you seem to have come across him somehow, and to dislike him greatly, I send you in duty bound these details gathered in the village ; as it seems rather a strange coincidence, that, in this remote corner of the earth, I should have run across him again.

“ I have made but few acquaintances yet. I have exchanged some words with the curate, a certain Mr. Wing. He seems a diffident kind of youth, who can hardly speak without flushing. But he strikes me as rather too much of a dandy, and somewhat tender in years, for the sole charge of a parish. The vicar is an invalid, and an absentee. Then there is a Mr. Bramley, a person of property in this neighbourhood, whom I came to know accidentally, and who did me a good-natured turn on my arrival here.

“ Next, I pass to Miss Caroline Rutherford, the niece of my employers, who arrived on a visit to Kidston about two days after I did. I fancy Miss Caroline is disposed to be kind to me, and would notice me more, only she fears to offend her aunt and uncle by undue familiarity with an inferior. A good-natured, chubby-faced country girl, a species of under-housemaid, (third housemaid is her precise title) who calls me in the morning, tells me that this is Miss Caroline’s first visit, and that she and her father—a clergyman

—are dismally poor. It seems that Mr. Rutherford and his brother have not spoken for years, and that this visit of the niece is the first approach to anything like friendliness which has occurred between the two families.

“ There only remain my two employers, whom I perhaps ought to spare from comment as long as they house and feed me. So let them remain blanks in this enumeration, as I fear I should write with faint enthusiasm about either. The chief folks in local respect seem to be the Esdailes of Garwood Priory, but none of these have I yet seen. The Rutherfords represent money about here, but the Esdailes represent descent. The natives seem easy-going, indolent, dilatory, stagnant folks, near in their coin, and hospitable in food and beer. A Cropshire farmer will feed a stranger to repletion, and never dream of payment, but the same farmer will refuse his oldest friend a loan of five shillings in ready money. They are good people enough, but the besetting sin of all folks about here, so far as I read them at

present, gentle and simple alike is—want of moral courage.

“ I may add to this a complete absence of gratitude for past favours, and an utter distrust in all present disinterestedness ; and you have, my kind friend, the Cropshire man in his general outlines. Having thus touched upon my chance meeting with your unwelcome visitor, on the local notables, and the national character, it is time to bring this tedious epistle to a close. Only, please remember, my dear Miss Bellamy, that you have yourself invited these dottings down during my Cropshire sojourn. Post just goes, so I conclude at once and excuse myself no farther, and remain,

“ Your grateful and devoted,

“ EMMA KLEIN.”

Julia Bellamy to Emma Klein.

“ *Arabian Crescent, Bayswater,*
“ *June 6th, 1862.*

“ MY DEAR EMMA,

“ I do not allow a single post to elapse without replying to your letter. You cannot imagine how important to my-

self and some of the Garwood people your information about this Monsieur Eyserbeck may prove to be. I am about to repose in you a very great confidence, and then to make you my agent in a difficult commission. The confidence first—This person is living at Garwood under an assumed name. He is not Eyserbeck; he is not a foreigner, although a residence of many years abroad renders such a personation to him extremely easy. He has also possessed from a boy some facility with his pencil and brush, so the *rôle* of wandering artist is as readily assumed as his Teutonic patent of nobility.

“Now listen, my dear girl, I may have been a little kind to you, and now you are to repay me sevenfold. This self-named Eyserbeck is plotting against Mr. Esdaile of Garwood Priory. Mr. Esdaile is noble, good-natured, and wholly unsuspecting. I wrote to him a week since, meaning my letter as a preparatory note of warning. Though then I merely guessed that this fellow might have taken up his quarters at the Garwood gates. Mr. Esdaile has not

even answered my communication by one line of acknowledgment. I am, therefore, confident that my missive has never reached his hands. I presume that this Eyserbeck—I would rather call him so than by the name which he has disgraced—has by some stratagem established a footing at the village post-office, and managed to intercept my letter, for the coming of which he was amply prepared.

“ Now, Emma, you must do this for me, since I do not care to entrust any further secrets to the Garwood mails. On to-morrow afternoon you must walk over to Garwood Priory, ring the front door bell bravely, and say that you desire to see Mr. Esdaile alone. Then ask him whether he has heard from Miss Bellamy during the past week. I am convinced that he will reply in the negative. Then give this simple message : ‘ A letter was written to you by Julia Bellamy, but it has evidently been intercepted. She bids me, therefore, say, that there is a person now in Garwood pretending to be a foreigner and an artist, *who has an eye upon your blotting-paper.*

If you wish to learn more, write to Miss Bellamy, but not through the Garwood post office, and be careful to post the letter with your own hands.'

"Having delivered this message withdraw, if the squire shows no wish to prolong the conversation. But should he question you further about me, answer him to the best of your ability, and with no kind of reticence. I need hardly say that I shall await the result of this interview with an anxious heart. I know that this commission is one that a girl of your disposition would gladly be excused from executing. Believe me, Emma, my need is great and imperious, or I should never have laid this burden upon you. Again, you may think, why does not Miss Bellamy hire a detective to watch this fellow, and leave me at peace? Ah, my dear Emma, I dare not entrust my private miseries to the tender mercies of Scotland Yard. Bear with me, and seek to know no more. Perform without question this irksome commission, fulfil my earnest entreaty by seeing Mr. Esdaile, and thus you will earn

the lasting gratitude of your true friend
and earnest well-wisher,

“JULIA BELLAMY.”

When the third housemaid gave Emma this letter on the following morning at her bedside (for the post arrived with cock-crow), the little governess rubbed her eyes more than once, in order to convince herself that she had not wrongly perused the very startling contents of the epistle, which lay open upon her pillow. As Emma dressed herself, she began to realize that she was pledged to a commission of no ordinary difficulty, the performance of which she could neither escape or evade. Miss Bellamy's urgent command ran, see Mr. Esdaile; and Mr. Esdaile must be seen. She discerned no outlet from that inexorable order. She must then trudge over to the Priory that very afternoon.

How slowly the tasks of the morning passed after she had taken this resolution. The meagre breakfast with her pupil in the cold attic : the dull constitutional round the shrubberies : the tedious music lesson :

the greasy exports and furry population of Poland : King Charles endlessly shuffling with his Parliament, and the Commons ceaselessly bullying the king : the boy who ran so many miles, while another boy ate so many apples, and a third did something else equally foolish, producing a result by rule of three that must have killed the second youth of indigestion. All these subjects were got through somehow ; until at length Emma reached a haven of repose, having set her pupil down to a comfortable pen-breaking exercise in German, where the verbs and the nominative cases, being on the worst possible terms, wisely elected to remain as far as possible apart at each end of the sentences.

So Jessie proceeded to translate into appropriate English such phrases as— Have you seen the golden dog of the swarthy baker ? We have not seen the silver cat of the swarthy baker's purple aunt. And all the changes of tense, colour, and attribute were rung between the baker, his aunt, and their respective quadrupeds. So, except for Jessie's sput-

tering quill pen, silence reigned in the Kidston school-room. And Emma drew once more Miss Bellamy's letter from the pocket of her plain black-silk gown, and gave it one more perusal, though she had already nearly learnt it by heart.

The crunching of wheels upon the gravel of the approach interrupted their studies.

"May I see who that is?" exclaimed Jessie, suddenly pausing in a new and fearful grammatical complication.

"Yes, love," agreed Emma, with a yawn.

Jessie sprang on a cane-bottomed chair, and craned forth. Emma would have readily varied the monotony of the morning by following her pupil's example, but her tutorial dignity forbade any such exhibition of girlish curiosity.

"It is Mr. Bramley, who has come to lunch," commented the child, leaning her chin forward at a perilous angle.

"Indeed!" rejoined Emma, with a slight flush.

"Have you seen the swarthy horses of the yellow Mr. Bramley?" improvised

Jessie, adapting her reminiscences of the chameleon baker to the recent arrival.

"You absurd child!"

"Ain't he nice?"

"Mr. Bramley?"

"No, that nearest horse of his."

"Come, come, Jessie; you will never have completed your exercise by luncheon."

"Do let me see them take those poor horses round, Miss Klein?"

"You will be all behind, Jessie."

"I say, Miss Klein, do you know what mamma said yesterday about Mr. Bramley?"

For the life of her, Emma could not repress a look of interest at this unexpected offer of information from her pupil.

Jessie encouraged, proceeded,—

"Mamma says that he is a good-natured simpleton."

"He is good-natured, Jessie, certainly."

"And, that any girl with half a head on her shoulders, might catch him. What does that mean, Miss Klein?"

"My dear," returned Emma, crimsoning "you should not repeat everything you

hear. This remark was solely intended for older people than you."

"But I *did* hear it," argued Jessie, practically, "and papa gave one of his short, dry laughs, and said, 'Why does not my newly-arrived niece secure him at once? He has a tidy rent-roll.'"

"I really must stop you, Jessie."

"Why, that is all," resumed her pupil, descending from her elevation. "There is not any more of it, so I need not be stopped; and there is the luncheon-bell."

So governess and pupil repaired to the dining-room. Here they found Mr. and Mrs. Rutherford, Caroline Rutherford, and Gilbert Bramley.

Gilbert Bramley shook hands with Emma, much to Mrs. Rutherford's surprise and disgust.

"I was not aware," she remarked under her voice, to Bramley, as they seated themselves, "that you could claim acquaintance with my new governess."

"Meaning Miss Klein," he responded airily. "Oh, yes, she is a delightful little person. Quite an acquisition in these wilds."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Rutherford, superciliously raising her eyebrows.

"May I carve those ducks for you?" proposed Bramley, good-naturedly.

One bird was nearly disposed of, when Jessie's voice suggested from the other end of the table, that Miss Klein had not been helped.

"A leg, if you please, for Miss Klein," interposed Mr. Rutherford decisively, and with great firmness.

This was duly amputated, and reached its destination.

"We dine on Tuesday," pursued Mrs. Rutherford, "at the Priory. I wish my niece to make the acquaintance of the Esdailes."

"I dine with them also on that day," observed Bramley, carelessly.

"Are they well?" from Mrs. Rutherford, raising her head languidly.

"Perfectly,—except Flora," was Bramley's rejoinder.

"Violet's pet?" cried Jessie, rushing into the conversation in a hurry of explanatory emphasis.

"To be sure," nodded Bramley, "worried by a sheep-dog and rescued by a lawyer's clerk. We are to meet him at dinner there, on Tuesday. I mean the lawyer's clerk, Jessie, and not the sheep-dog."

"Am I to understand you," interposed Rutherford, in a consequential tone, "that Esdaile has taken to invite that class of person to his dinner-table? I may be mistaken, but I cannot see the good of this confusion of classes."

"You know," explained Bramley to the master of the house, "this is old Lucas Raymond's nephew. You remember his bald head, eh, Miss Klein?"

And Bramley directed a rapid glance of amusement in Miss Klein's direction, as he made this appeal.

"You seem quite old friends with my governess," said Mrs. Rutherford, with a dry cough of disapprobation.

Bramley read in Emma's appealing glances, that such half-confidences had better cease, as only tending to exasperate her mistress.

"Lucas Raymond," resumed Rutherford,

with oracular ponderosity, "is an estimable man,—in his place. Still, why his nephew should associate with county society remains, in my humble opinion, to be explained."

"He will not be asked again," consoled Bramley, with a cough of apology.

"Perhaps not," agreed the capitalist, swelling with displeasure. "Indeed, I should think certainly not."

"Caroline," struck in Mrs. Rutherford, with an amiable wish to complete the demolition of Emma by bringing her niece's accomplishments on the carpet. "Mr. Bramley would like, I am sure, to see your water-colours afterwards."

Now Mrs. Rutherford, of forethought and device, had seated Mr. Bramley next to her niece at the luncheon-table; but, as yet, conversation being general, he had hardly spoken a word to Caroline, to whom he had only just been introduced.

"If Mr. Bramley cares," agreed Caroline in a tone of indifference; "but they are poor things enough."

"I shall be most interested to inspect them," rejoined the young squire, softening

at once in his manner towards the young lady. "By the way, we have a travelling artist of some merit in the village now—I believe a German. Now if any lady wanted lessons——"

"My niece," insisted Mrs. Rutherford with a toss of the head, "may be pronounced *finished* in water-colours. She also plays extremely well at sight."

Bramley listened in respectful silence. Caroline made a gesture of annoyance, and began to crumble her bread. A slight pause ensued, broken by the master of the house.

"I object to stray artists in general," enunciated Mr. Rutherford at the back of his throat, enforcing the reflection with a warning forefinger. "I should not wish to have any such persons about my house. They are far from orderly in their habits, they frequent taverns."

"Hem!" says Mrs. Rutherford, hurriedly pouring herself out some water in a wine glass.

"My dear," said Rutherford, glancing at his wife, "do you find the room too warm?"

"I have only swallowed a crumb," retorted Mrs. Rutherford with some asperity. "Don't be a fidget, Bassett."

"I hope," threw in Bramley by way of diversion, "that you and Miss Rutherford will not fail our flower-show next week."

"Will there be dahlias?" enquired Caroline with animation. "You must know I am a complete Cockney."

"We must put you down on our list of lady patronesses," proposed Bramley gallantly. "I shall tell the secretary to book you at once. The new doctor here succeeds the old doctor, as a matter of course, in the secretaryship of the flower show. Well, we are certainly shy of innovation in Cropshire. We jog along in the old ruts. They say the new doctor, quite unconscious of the inheritance which had devolved upon him, had quite an angry scene with a would-be exhibitor, who came to him for information—the doctor denying the secretaryship, and his visitor contradicting him flatly."

"I receive your anecdote, Bramley," emphasized Rutherford with the butt-end of

his knife, "as a convincing proof that there is much sound conservative feeling in Garwood. Is this new doctor at all a presentable person?"

"Seems a good sort of fellow," commented Bramley, trifling with his watch-chain; "a little flighty in his manner, not exactly a gentleman, but, query, do we want a gentleman in his place? His name is—let me see—Edgar Lapworth. Mind, I mean to ask him to book you next time I see him, Miss Rutherford."

"Please, don't, Mr. Bramley," stammered Caroline, becoming perfectly crimson. "I would rather explain—the matter—to him—personally."

"Then you know the doctor, Miss Rutherford?"

"N-no, not exactly—that is to say, I have seen him once or twice," winced Caroline in faltering accents.

"My dear child," interposed Mrs. Rutherford with a frown, "what nonsense you are talking. Let me answer for my niece, Mr. Bramley, that she *can* have no previous acquaintance with this general practitioner.

And now, I am sure we have sat here long enough, and we shall find the drawing-room much airier and pleasanter, where we will look over those sketches, if you like, Mr. Bramley."

So the Kidston dining-room was deserted, and Emma Klein put on her walking-dress, and, with a beating heart, issued forth to execute the difficult commission of her benefactress.

Poor little Emma! It was rather galling as she trudged along to reflect, that, while she was picking her way in the miry Cropshire lanes, Caroline Rutherford was doing her best to fascinate Mr. Gilbert Bramley. He had been so kind to Emma that day. He meant to be so kind to her still, even when he met her in her dependent position. But surely the slights and snubs of Mrs. Rutherford must end by lowering the poor governess in his eyes. Would any man have the moral courage to keep his first favourable impression of any girl untarnished, if he saw her exposed unresisting to continual depreciation? For instance, on that particular day, she had no right to enter the drawing-

room, whither all the rest of the party had adjourned. Mr. Bramley meant kindly, but she felt confident that he must soon, very soon, utterly change to her.

And now she must put her own grievances for the present on the shelf, and try to nerve herself to see this unknown Mr. Esdaile. What a strange place this Garwood was! Everyone seemed so dull and stagnant. All things there appeared to be in the same state in which the diluvial waters had left them. All things seemed likely to remain unchanged till Doomsday. And yet, every now and then, under this crass surface of Bœotian life, came hints of volcanic secrets crushed in and smouldering beneath; shot glimpses of fierce human passion and old forgotten crimes ready to blaze out amid all this prim stereotyped respectability; here stood Convention, like Michael, with its foot on the neck of human nature; but this terrible crushed snake only waited for a second of sleepfulness on the part of its oppressor to reassert itself and ruin another microcosm.

Now this quiet little governess possessed considerable powers of observation. She

could also keep her tongue quiet and her eyes open, two qualities truly estimable when combined. Therefore, when she met Mr. Lapworth in Mr. his predecessor's gig halfway to Garwood, the doctor arrested his raw-boned, Roman-nosed, half-singed horse to greet the governess; in return, she managed to save him some trouble, and to extract from him some information.

"Good morning, Miss Klein," from the doctor in his gig.

"Are you bound Kidston way?" from Emma by the hedge.

"Yes, to see a housemaid there," nodded the young practitioner.

"She is better. You need not visit her to-day, supposing you have graver cases," threw in Emma.

"Thanks. Well, I am rather over-run with coughs and casualties."

"You know Miss Caroline Rutherford, I think, Mr. Lapworth?"

"Did she tell you so?"

"Not in so many words; but I inferred it."

"Oh, yes, I know her."

"Do you like Garwood?"

"I'm too busy to decide that—yet. Do you like Kidston?"

"I am occupied there too."

"Diplomatic, eh, Miss Klein?" laughed Lapworth, jerking his horse's mouth. "Good morning."

So he drove off his horse at a long swinging trot.

"Miss Caroline does know the doctor," reflected Emma, as she pursued her miry course; "and pretty well, too, if I am not mistaken."

Half an hour more brought her to Garwood park walls. The girl in charge of the gate made no difficulty about her admission; Emma merely said that she wished to see Mr. Esdaile. Admitted, she followed the ill-weeded roadway up towards the house, beset by numerous grazing heifers and pasturing colts, whom she was too much of a Londoner to pass through wholly free from nervousness and apprehension. Then succeeded a sprinkling of sheep, who were nearly all lame, and cropped the grass on their bent fore-knees. At length the

Priory appeared ; and some hundred yards in front of it, against the sky-line, rode a tall gentleman, on a pony, coming in Miss Klein's direction.

Thanks to Mr. Bramley's description, on the day of her arrival, Emma knew that this must surely be Mr. Esdaile. She felt greatly relieved at her good fortune in meeting him out-of-doors. This lucky encounter lightened greatly her difficult task. She had by no means relished the idea of arousing the curiosity of the Garwood domestics, by a formal appeal to the front door-bell, and a ceremonious introduction to the squire's magisterial study.

Mr. Esdaile approached slowly. He had just lunched, and was in a ruminant, contemplative mood. He speculated lazily on the slight feminine figure, which wound up the pathway to meet him. He little expected that chance passenger in his park would in any way influence the current of his subsequent existence. Mr. Esdaile's main reflection as the figure approached was, that his female servants were always running down to Garwood town ; and that

their friends were always running up to Garwood Priory to see them. But this girl was a stranger, and a pretty one. The squire would have passed her with this reflection, and continued his route ; but Emma stopped and hesitated, and the squire checked his pony, and paused opposite the embarrassed little damsel.

“ Mr. Esdaile, I believe,” faltered Emma, with a very becoming blush.

“ Ay, ay,” said the squire, smoothing his quadruped’s mane. “ What can I do for you ?”

Emma looked Mr. Esdaile straight in the face very gallantly, and began her disclosure.

“ Mr. Esdaile,” she commenced, “ I address you as a complete stranger——”

“ I certainly do not recall your features,” murmured the squire, shifting about uneasily in his saddle, and beginning to feel in each of his waistcoat pockets.

“ Stay, sir !” exclaimed Emma, colouring, “ you mistake me. I—I am not in want.”

“ Beg your pardon, I’m sure,” muttered

the horseman, withdrawing his hand abruptly.

"A most natural mistake ; but——" and here once more Emma reddened and broke down.

"Take time," nodded the squire, benignantly, "take time."

"I bring you an important message," stammered Emma, with a desperate plunge at her intelligence.

"Say a bill, now, or a letter," hazarded the squire, rubbing his left knee.

"Neither," denied Emma, hurriedly. "I fear I am destined to astonish you."

"Madam," returned the squire, with a little courteous bow of resignation, "you have done so already."

"I am to ask you one question first," petitioned Emma, with an imploring glance.

"About Mrs. Wilfred?" enquired the squire, in a lower voice, with an uneasy jerk of his head in the direction of the house.

"Nothing about her," broke in Emma, with vehement emphasis.

"Thank God," said the squire, fervently, drawing a deep breath of relief.

"Mr. Esdaile," asked Emma, in a half whisper, almost leaning against the pony's shoulder, "have you heard within the last ten days from Miss Julia Belamy?"

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated the squire, dropping his hunting-whip, and perfectly rigid with amazement.

"Indeed, indeed," implored Emma, rather dismayed at the effect she had produced, "I must know; I have urgent need for knowing."

"In the name of all that is miraculous," responded Esdaile, slowly, with a momentary flush, "what induces you to ask me such a question?"

"That depends on your reply," rejoined Emma, eagerly.

"Double the days," pursued the squire, in a hollow voice, "and reckon every day a year, and I might answer 'yes.'"

It was Emma's turn to look rather astonished now.

"So long a time, squire?"

"Ay, my lass, every hour of it."

"Miss Julia has written to you within a

week, for all that," persisted Emma, with obstinate resolution.

"I am just the last person in the world," said Mr. Esdaile, with a touch of sadness, "whom Julia Bellamy would write to."

"Written she has," panted Emma, stamping her foot in real earnestness; "and she is nearly certain that her letter has been stolen."

The squire stared at the resolute little figure, and demanded suddenly,

"And, pray, who may you be?"

"Emma Klein, a governess."

"Then," he continued, with a vacant face, "have the kindness, Emma Klein, to pinch my arm. Convince me that yonder is Garwood Priory, this my old pony, and that I am Harvey Esdaile, out of bed, and wide awake on that same pony's back!"

"Pray be composed, Mr. Esdaile," entreated Emma, clasping her hands; "for the most serious part of my disclosure remains to be made."

Emma then picked up the hunting-whip, which the horseman received almost mechanically. For the squire sat completely

dumbfounded ; and at one time he pressed a hand to his brow, and at another time he shook himself.

“Squire,” continued Emma, watching the transitions of his face, “just give this question one moment’s calm, deliberative thought. Is there any one about here whom you could suspect of intercepting your letters ?”

The squire roused himself with an effort, and laid his head on one side to consider.

“Mrs. Wilfred,” he murmured at length, half inaudibly.

“O wide, wide of the mark !” exclaimed Emma, with a gesture of impatience.

At this moment, some three hundred yards from the squire’s back, a shrubby gate at the Priory opened, and swung to again with a sharp click. The squire started in his saddle at the sound, and twisting himself round, beheld to his dismay, Mrs. Wilfred and Violet starting for a walk, and coming on towards them at a brisk pace.

“Good heaven !” muttered the unfortunate squire, “here is Mrs. Wilfred. Be a

good girl, and trip back again as fast as you can. You know the bit of village green behind Lucas Raymond's——"

Emma, eyeing the squire's consternation with a mixture of amusement and vexation, confessed that she remembered the spot.

"Be there in half an hour," whispered the squire, producing a turnip watch and long seals, "and tell me the rest there."

"Be it so," agreed Emma, turning rather petulantly to depart.

"You see," stammered the squire, waving his hand, tamely and apologetically, "that, in any matter of a confidential nature, Mrs. Wilfred is possibly not the very best person to associate in our counsels, possessed though she may be of many estimable qualities. There — for goodness sake—let us separate."

Emma Klein, with a little saucy smile at the nervousness of the squire, turned back with no more ado towards the lodge-gates. Esdaile slowly pivotted round his rather unwieldy pony, and walked him slowly

back to meet Mrs. Wilfred and her daughter.

"Not reached the village yet, Harvey?" beamed Mrs. Wilfred, sailing up like the figure-head of a ship.

"I have been detained," explained the squire, tugging at his pony's mane, "by an accidental—hem!—circumstance."

"Circumstance indeed!" rejoined his sister-in-law, with some asperity. "May I ask, pray, Mr. Esdaile, who that person was?"

"You may ask, certainly," faltered the squire, changing colour.

"A polite intimation," observed Mrs. Wilfred, viciously, "that I shall waste my question."

"I know nothing about her," muttered the squire, stroking his chin, "I never laid eyes on her before to-day."

"She seemed," persisted Mrs. Wilfred, frowning her brow, "in the distance a flaunting kind of thing."

"And rather pretty, eh, mamma?" corroborated Violet, naïvely.

"Nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Wilfred, with emphatic decision.

"I did not notice her—flaunt," repeated the squire, moodily.

"Not you?" murmured the widow, in a contemptuous aside to her daughter.

"She came on business," remarked the squire, rubbing his hands together, nervously, "and,—surely, we have discussed this lady sufficiently."

"We are all ladies now," sneered Mrs. Wilfred, with a happy blending of irony and playfulness; "well, you magistrates have to receive charming visitors."

"With your permission, Mrs. Wilfred," said the squire, bowing a little stiffly, "I mean to continue my ride."

"Do not let *us* detain you," returned Mrs. Wilfred, airily, "we are not fair unknowns, and the squire must only be delayed in their cause."

So Mrs. Wilfred walked herself off in high dudgeon, and Violet followed, glancing round as she went, with an amused face, at her uncle.

But Mr. Esdaile only shook his head in reply. To him the situation was becoming too serious to smile about.

"Ah!" soliloquized the squire, when the ladies had departed, "I have not the remotest notion what this little governess, who has dropped from the clouds, is going to tell me. I presume, however, that my old rival Bellamy is somehow connected with the mysterious revelation. But, whatever the secret is, I have every confidence that Mrs. Wilfred will run it to ground speedily, and use to my utmost disadvantage. Heigho! For a quiet life, and no lack of ready money to repair my gates with."

So the squire made a circuit into the village by another lodge to avoid Mrs. Wilfred; and on the green behind Lucas Raymond's he duly found Emma, with whom he earnestly conversed for nearly half an hour. From that interview, he returned to the house, looking half a dozen years older. One thing he immediately did, was to dispatch a letter to Lucas Raymond; another thing he did, was to summon his head gamekeeper. Last, he sat down and wrote to Julia Bellamy; and, after several failures, succeeded at length

in producing an epistle to his mind. This he posted with his own hands at an obscure hamlet, with a district post-office, lying some three miles south-west of Garwood, by name Waverton.

But, on this day, the squire's ill-luck was somehow eminently in the ascendant. For as Mrs. Wilfred and Violet came home through the village, the fates ordained that one Tommy Samler should encounter them on his return from school. Him Mrs. Wilfred arrested with inquiries concerning his mother, a woman as ailing as she was disputatious. This young rook must needs volunteer the statement, in reply to a chance query of the widow's, that he had seen the squire on Ripley Green in conversation with a lady. He was instantly pounced upon, and rigidly cross-examined, with this result: The urchin believed the lady wore a blue serge dress; admitted that the squire had talked with her ever so long; could not fix the time, but had played three games of marbles; fancied the lady was not old; admitted that he, witness, was fond of ginger-bread, but did not

see it often ; would gratefully accept any amount of hard-bake or bulls' eyes in recognition of his powers of observation.

So Mrs. Wilfred, at no unreasonable outlay, rewarded Tommy Samler with various viscid compounds. The small whelp sped on his way rejoicing and sticky, while the two ladies retraced their steps to the house. But Mrs. Wilfred remained in a brown study all the way, and hardly a syllable could Violet elicit from her perplexed and abstracted parent.





CHAPTER IX.

THE DAYS OF DIONYSIUS.

Extract from the Diary of Christopher Bellamy.

"June 4th.

"**T**HE self-denial of the human race is a quality in all respects admirable. To endure temporary inconvenience for the sake of permanent benefit, shows character and purpose; therefore, my good friend, Christopher Bellamy, I am beginning to be extremely proud of you. A good idea this, to merge one's identity into that chattering fool Dionysius Eyserbeck's. I know the man thoroughly by heart, it is so easy to mimic his accent in speaking English, in fact I have only to project myself into the rôle of Eyserbeck, and my incognito is secured. Now a less dexterous fellow than your friend

would have assumed some wholly imaginary name ; he would have merely formed himself upon a hazy abstract notion of what *à priori*, a foreign artist ought to be like. I know better. Realism is the great secret of success in all art—dramatic or pictorial. I little imagined when, for want of funds, after a too lively season in Vienna, I had to endure three months of charitable dependence at the chateau of this garrulous, though good-natured, nonentity, in the Tyrol ; that I could ever utilize the tedious study of his vapidities with real personal profit in after years. So it is, an able workman can turn to good account mere dross and shavings. Poor old Eyserbeck, at the other end of Europe. He little imagines what a spirited dramatic rendering of his foibles is being enacted for the benefit of a few Cropshire rustics. My cue is extremely simple, *act* Eyserbeck all day. The imitation will, if steadily persisted in, become a second nature.

“ But, O self-denying Eyserbeck, let me *think* as Eyserbeck also, in what a den of a place have you been content to hide

your glorious head ; at a season when all the Siren pleasures of Babylon the great—untasted for twenty-two years—stretch out their old Circean goblet to your truant lips. I repeat, man is a self-denying animal. I meditate on this great truth in the mouldy sitting-room of the ‘Headless Woman,’ with a chorus of ostlers and poultry under my window.*

“*June 5th.*—I was in a moralizing vein yesterday, superinduced by the dispiriting influence of this abominable provincial dog-hole. To-day I mean to take practical stock of the situation. Let me re-state this succinctly. The case lies in a nutshell. A certain proof, easily annihilated if once in my possession, is detained either in Garwood Priory or at the office of one Lucas Raymond, attorney to the Garwood family. This proof I must get at all hazard. Fail, and my old continental vagabondage recommences. Succeed, and

* “Headless Woman,” a barbarous sign, but a blessed conception. A woman with no head is *à fortiori*, a woman with no tongue. A great idealization.

I have the handling of, say five thousand a year, during my wife's life ; and I devote five annual hundreds of this towards insuring myself a pretty round sum at her decease—self-denial again beautifully exemplified—to console me for the deplorable loss of such an excellent—income! I fix my estimate at five thousand from the perusal at Doctors' Commons of my uncle's will—industry combined with self-denial. It may be more, it may be less. All will be practically mine, once these proofs have ceased to exist. Let me explain how. Julius Bellamy, doubtless, believed himself a vastly clever man, when he interposed these trustees, Stimpson and Padfield, to protect Julia's interests. My worthy uncle deceased, let me assure your respected shade, that I intend to make your trustees—moonshine, and their trust deed—waste paper. You have tied up everything tight enough ; but in England the pressure of the husband is as the pressure of the atmosphere. You may diminish, but you cannot eliminate it wholly. Your utmost legal fetters come to this, you pay Julia her income quarterly,

into her sole hands, and receive her sole receipt. Thus far I, Julia's husband, have no more to do with the matter than Julia's coachman. But, not trustees, equity court, vice-chancellors, or Lord Chancellor himself, can prevent the husband, now by wheedling and then by terrorism, from occasionally beating, or at intervals coaxing, the actual notes or coins out of his wife's hand, the moment the door is shut on the trustees' back. Let the payments be weekly, the process of extortion becomes weekly also. Thank God for this; and, that we still live in a free and civilized country.

“Very well! Does my imaginary reader—I devoutly hope I shall never have one—follow me so far? Or is he tempted to rejoin: Why not grab Julia's income now, and never bother yourself with these plots and disguises? Ah, my sanguine friend, but here lies the rub. While this inconvenient documentary evidence remains undestroyed, my wife's trustees would infallibly have me—well, out of prudence I will leave a blank—if I drove them to extremi-

ties. That is, I flatter myself, a business-like statement of my difficulties. So now I will brush these legal cobwebs out of my brain by a brisk turn in the direction of Garwood park.

“*June 6th.*—I can report decided progress to-day. I met my arch-enemy Harvey Esdaile, face to face ; and not a gleam of recognition passed over his rather sheeplike countenance. I felt assured he would not know me ; but then it is comfortable to have an assurance of this kind confirmed by actual experimental proof. Certainly, the small-pox has terribly blurred my once classical features. I have sat in young days for the emperor Titus, who was, let me remind my historical reader, the handsomest man of his time. Excuse the vanity of an autobiographer which has perpetrated this digression. Then Esdaile has never seen me in my flowing moustache and rippling beard, tinged, candour compels me to admit, with frequent gray ; then Esdaile merely knew me as an acquaintance, and saw me some dozen times in all ; then, there is the alteration of twenty-two not very

steady years, but I will not prolong the melancholy catalogue. The fact being, that Esdaile does not know me from Adam, and I rejoice greatly at being forgotten. I also saw the Garwood ladies to-day, and got leave to sketch in the park through a slip of a curate, whom I have impressed greatly. This is a step, though only a step, in the right direction. They are bringing in my mockery of a dinner. How I sigh for the *Trois Frères* ! But I am engaged in a great work, and must accept its concomitant hardships !

“I heard to-day, accidentally, through the boots, that Rutherford, my old associate, and virtual accomplice in my final *fiasco*, is playing at respectability in a fine place much nearer Garwood than I supposed. This may turn out a trump card in my hand ; only I cannot yet quite see clearly, whether to combine or to leave out Rutherford in my campaign against Esdaile. Again, if we stumble against each other, what attitude am I to assume towards my quondam ally ? For Rutherford I believe *would* recognise me. Let me

consider. The man is married now, and prosperous, *ergo* in my present penurious state, he will wish me at the devil. If I boldly paid my respects to him, I could render him very uncomfortable, but his actual complicity in my 'management' of Esdaile's hem—paper—would be extremely difficult to prove; while, as far as I am concerned, these proofs at present unluckily exist in black and white. On the whole, I think, I shall not embarrass my plans with Rutherford for the present. I can see no likely aid to be derived from him. And as regards this—thing of which I hope to possess myself,—Rutherford's interest would prefer the paper being saved, as it does not compromise him, and keeps me at bay; to its being destroyed, which involves my return to society, and to England. Resolved therefore, to leave Rutherford alone at present.

"*June 7th.*—A good stroke of business to-day. Sketching, as usual, in the park, I see 'the squire' drive off one way, and the ladies trip out in the other. I therefore present myself humbly at the kitchen-door,

on the pretext of wanting a piece of string to mend my camp-stool. I manage to establish a flirtation with a decent-looking housemaid, who is immoderately amused at my—poor Eyserbeck's—broken English. There is a strange determination of redness to this girl's wrists, elbows, and eye-brows ; but, except her teeth, she is in other respects really passable. I find her ideas on landscape painting, as distinguished from photography, extremely vague. She demands whether I couldn't 'take her,' with her young man ; and if a sunny day would render my likenesses more striking. She regards me as a species of mendicant, much on a par with tinkers, pedlars, and ragamuffins, who come to buy rabbit-skins. I ask her casually whether there are any pictures of trees in her master's house. She rejoins confidently, that her master has representations of almost everything strung up in all directions. This sounds rather chaotic. I profess incredulity, and desire, if possible, a peep at the collection ; adding, that as I knew the family were all out, no one would be the wiser. She consents to refer the

subject to the housekeeper, and I am taken to what she calls *par excellence* the room. An old lady in spectacles, counting out a wilderness of household linen, greets me. The 'room' is hung with portraits of prize pigs and favourite hunters; also the squire himself—a vapid lithograph, in the attitude of a noble Roman. Last, some peaches on the sea-shore (as a likely and appropriate background), depicted by Miss Violet Esdaile, at the age of fifteen, and 'framed up,' as the housekeeper puts it, by her ap-
plausive uncle. All these works of art I duly admire. I suggest a visit to the rest of the house, absently laying two half-crowns upon a heap of table-napkins. The housekeeper consents, and precedes me, jingling her keys. The library at the Priory is a handsome room; and some of a long line of family portraits have real merit. But my special business lay with a little iron door, which caught my eye at once in the further recess of the library, near a blank window. I made a rapid ground-plan of its situation, while I seemed to be immersed in studying a picture near it. The house-

keeper told me, with no kind of reticence, that the squire 'kep' his deeds and plate in there. I hazarded mildly, that I hoped the lock was a good one. The old domestic returned that it ought to be, as the old lock had been replaced, some years back, by a new one from Bramah, which cost, she heard, a pretty sight of money.

"After this, my interest in art flags. I recollect an engagement, and cut short the housekeeper's endless diatribe on the virtues of the Esdailes past and present. I get out by the kitchen-door, just in time to dodge the returning squire on his pony, behind some lilac bushes. I return to my study of foliage in a mood serene, amiable, almost triumphant. The dimensions of my enquiry have now greatly reduced themselves. Are the documents—whose incrimination I desire—behind that Bramah lock at the Priory, or in old Lucas Raymond's custody, in the village? Move the next :—Resolved, that Dionysius Eyserbeck do forthwith call upon Lucas Raymond.

"*June 8th.*—The solitude of my present

existence is beginning to oppress me like lead. I, the most companionable being upon earth, the brilliant conversationalist, waste myself upon ostlers and chamber-maids. I have had an attack of the blue devils. The cognac here is execrable. I must write to Fortnum and Mason for a hamper by rail, if I am to be here much longer. I tried to conquer my depression by the inferior stimulants of the 'Headless Woman's' bar, but the result was an aggravation of the symptoms. I am very low. Everything unpleasant in my past career seems just now acutely present in my mind. I have been thinking, among other disagreeable topics, about Julia, nearly all day. I wonder what has set her running in my thoughts? Supposing she knew I was here, would or would she not warn Esdaile? What an impulsive fool I was to blurt out at our second interview some hint about going out of town. I passed it off afterwards dexterously enough, so I believe she suspects nothing. Anyhow, she has not written yet. At the first note of warning, my leave to sketch about the park will be

suspended. I shall be able to feel the pulse of the enemy thus at its first moment of increased agitation. Must I work by deputy after that? No need for deciding this point till it arises. It is a dripping wet day, and this desolate city of stagnation has trebled its normal dismalness. I should like to employ my time by a visit to the Esdaile family lawyer, but what earthly pretext can I devise for seeing him?

* * * * *

"After writing the above, I had a flash of inspiration. I rang the bell: not much in this. The waitress at this tavern appeared. No great miracle in that. Wait a moment my most patient reader—Here I must once more rush off at a tangent to chronicle while the thought is hot, a wholly admirable suggestion. Suppose I dedicate these fugitive pages to no less a person than poor Eyserbeck himself. He shall be my reader, and I will address him tenderly now and then as such. Dear fellow, how richly that ought to repay this trifling loan to me of his personality!

"Where was I, my Eyserbeck? oh, I

rung the bell and produced the chambermaid. Two capacities are united in the domestic arrangements here. Don't imagine you have caught my accuracy tripping, my worthy Prussian. Now for the inspiration.

" 'Mary,' said I, gravely, in broken English, 'who is the most quarrelsome man in Garwood?'

" Mary, simpering, opined there were a good many quarrelsome folks everywhere.

" 'Mary,' I repeat, nothing daunted, 'You must know, this is no reply of yours in a court of justice. But consider once more. Has anyone been to law in Garwood, lately?'

" I may as well mention, that I bear the character at this rustic hostelry of being an eccentric but harmless idiot. Not flattering, my friend of the Tyrol, but convenient enough for my present purpose.

" The girl, after a pause, mentions one farmer Barnfather, as having figured at the assizes during the late winter.

" 'What was the nature,' I demand, 'of Mr. Barnfather's civil action?'

“‘It was a quarrel,’ surmised Mary, ‘about some hay-stacks with his father’s executioners.’”

“‘Mary,’ I rejoined with decision. ‘That will not do.’

“Mary regretted to hear it, but originated nothing further, and had evidently exhausted her catalogue of litigants in those parts.

“‘Come,’ I insisted in a tone of authority, ‘You must find me some one else, who has taken the law of his neighbours.’

“‘There was Mrs. Samler, to be sure,’ reflected Mary, ‘but she’s not worth mention, being so paltry.’

“‘On the contrary, my good girl,’ I interposed, with alacrity, ‘she sounds extremely likely to suit me. What did she fall out about?’

“‘Next door’s poultry,’ sneered Mary, with a giggle.

“‘The very woman I want.’ I fervently exclaimed. ‘Heaven only grant that she has children.’

“‘Three,’ said Mary, opening her eyes very wide, ‘at the national school, lauk a mussy!’

“ ‘Then, Mary,’ I concluded, in quiet triumph, ‘I mean to thrash one of Mrs. Samler’s children till he howls again.’ ”

“ Mary thought me demented, and left the room cramming an apron into her mouth. ”

“ Learning that the national school ‘loosed’ at four in the afternoon, I duly proceeded thither ; and, collaring one of the first boys who rushed out, gave him a penny to indicate to me one of the Samler progeny. I then seized the young Samler, whom my first informant had just pointed out, and angrily asked, what he meant by looking disrespectfully at a foreign gentleman of distinction ? ”

“ The boy stared, and merely grinned. I then raised my camp-stool on high, as if to demolish him, at which demonstration he fled terrified homewards, closely pursued by your humble servant. I took good care *not* to overtake him, wishing to be brought into actual collision with his litigious parent, the redoubtable Mrs. Samler herself. But I kept near enough in pursuit to frighten the boy most thoroughly ; and when at last he ran to earth in one of the

High Street cottages, he disappeared into his domestic circle with a bellow so portentous, that in less than two seconds Mrs. Samler herself appeared on the door-step, flushed and menacing. Then indeed succeeded a torrent of eloquence from the cottage dame, interspersed with excited denunciations of village youth from your unworthy personator, oh, most erudite of Teutons. Mrs. Samler invoked the extreme penalties of the law against one who had dared to raise a finger against any child of hers. I retorted that boys who treated foreign gentlemen with disrespect, did so at their own peril. A crowd collected, and finally the rural police arrived, from an adjoining tap, in the person of one Inspector Bradbeer, accompanied by his shadow and satellite, policeman Culf. I mention these worthies specially, as they have greatly amused me for some time past. On the intervention of the authorities, both Mrs. Samler and myself appeal at the same time vociferously to the inspector. He is unable to decide between us, but recommends cross-summonses to be taken out by

both parties to the quarrel. Mrs. Samler treats this suggestion with scorn, and shrilly announces, that she means to have heavy damages for her own profit, and none of your trumpery fines, which only enrich the Government. Inspector Bradbeer resents her tone as personally disrespectful to himself, as representing the central authority; whereupon she retreats into her cottage, and slams the door in the faces of the two policemen. These worthies first disperse the crowd, and afterwards proceed to disperse themselves. And now, armed with full and sufficient pretext by my own ingenuity, I repair to the premises of Mr. Lucas Raymond, and jerk the lawyer's bell with an impatient tug, indicative of urgent haste and important business.

"I hear a step approaching the door inside, but still the door is not opened. I become conscious that I am undergoing inspection, previous to admittance, through a side-window of the entrance-hall. This process reminds me of gaming-houses in foreign towns, where the police are vigilant; but why on earth should this obscure

country attorney entrench himself in a state of siege? To settle this question, I again apply my hand vigorously to the bell-handle. Instead of an opened door, the steps retreat timidly along the passage; I manage to hear a knock at a door inside, and a voice, a woman's probably, calls 'Mr. Philip.'

"I cannot make out this Mr. Philip's rejoinder; but the previous voice continues,

" 'Please answer the door for me, Mr. Philip. There is a foreign-looking man there, whom I am afraid of.'

"This female servant of the lawyer is, I reflect, by no means a bad physiognomist. See, my dear Eyserbeck, how ready I am to appreciate talent, even to my own disadvantage.

"A heavier step approaches now. I am admitted by an ordinary young man enough. Evidently this lawyer's clerk.

"He fears that I have been kept waiting; I rejoin, all politeness, that this is of no consequence. I look around for the female physiognomist, but she has disappeared. He leads me into the lawyer's office.

There are shelves of square black tin and japanned boxes, neatly lettered in white paint, as to whose affairs their contents bear relation. I see several have the name of Esdaile. This is becoming exciting. The clerk offers me a chair, and says that Mr. Raymond will return every moment. He further hands me a local newspaper, which I don't read, but use as a screen between the clerk and myself, while I narrowly scrutinize every corner of the apartment and its contents. This is noteworthy: three boxes with the name of Esdaile occupy one shelf; then occurs a gap, just large enough to contain another box; and then the shelf terminates. I have barely concluded my inspection, when the lawyer returns in person. A cumbrous, leather-faced man, with a dull eye. I rise, and bow respectfully.

"'Is your business important?' he demands, drawing off his gloves.

"'Mr. Raymond,' I reply, with well-feigned agitation, 'I am in a situation of urgent peril. A stranger and a foreigner, I claim your legal aid. Even now, I may

be dragged before a local tribunal, and disgraced for ever. I am ignorant of your processes ; and my liberty—my name itself, may be compromised by an ignorance as fatal as it may prove distressing——’

“ The lawyer puts out his hand to arrest my volubility.

“ ‘ Well then,’ he decides, with an air of reluctance, ‘ I will take your business first. Allow me, however, before you proceed, to give some brief instructions to my clerk, and then I shall be wholly at your service.’

“ ‘ Mr. Lawyer,’ I respond, warmly, ‘ you have preserved an injured man. I shall gratefully await your attention.’

“ The lawyer beckons his clerk into a corner of the apartment, and holds him by the button-hole, while they converse with lowered voices. My ears, dear Eyserbeck, are as quick as a dog’s or an old maid’s. Therefore, not a syllable escapes me.

“ ‘ I say, Philip,’ muttered the lawyer, ‘ you must take this box up to the Priory for me now. I can’t turn a new client away for this whim of Esdaile’s.’

“ ‘ Will it not do to-morrow ?’ suggested the clerk, dubiously.

“ ‘Apparently not,’ replied Mr. Raymond; ‘though I don’t see the hurry myself. The squire’s written orders leave me no choice. Mind you must see Esdaile in person. It won’t do, leaving this in a servant’s hands.’

“ ‘I quite understand,’ said the clerk.

“ ‘Then you are wiser than I am,’ interposed his employer, petulantly, ‘for I cannot comprehend what maggot in Esdaile’s brain makes him require at some hours’ notice a deed-box, which for nearly twenty years has rested comfortably on my shelves here.’

“ ‘I take this up in a fly?’ presumed the clerk, reaching his hat down from a peg.

“ ‘Ay, ay,’ fussed the lawyer. ‘I expect one round every moment.’

“ ‘From the inn?’ questioned the clerk.

“ ‘Here comes the conveyance,’ exclaimed the elder lawyer, as the one mouldy vehicle of my tavern-yard appeared at the window, driven by my very good friend the ostler. Note, the fact of the inn poultry roosting in and on it at night—as I ascertained from my bed-room window they did—was much

against this fly presenting a spruce and bright appearance, when put into sudden requisition.

“‘Here’s the fly, sure enough,’ coincided the younger clerk. ‘Just give me a hand up with that box in the passage, will you, uncle?’

“‘Where is the housekeeper?’ demanded Lucas, gruffly.

“‘Seems strange and unwell,’ explained the clerk in a lower voice.

“‘Excuse me then, one moment,’ from Lucas to your humble servant; and out went both the lawyers.

“I rush to the window, and flatten my nose against the glass. I see the box carried out; I note its colour, dimensions, and superscription, well. The last runs,—‘Harvey Esdaile, Esq., Garwood, 1845.’ I shall know it again. This done, I spring back to my arm-chair, and when the elder lawyer re-appears alone, I am lazily perusing the county paper.

“Imagine, Eyserbeck, the feelings of your unworthy friend at this juncture. Had Julia then actually warned this stolid

Esdaile, and was this hasty removal of the Esdaile family muniments due to her amiable interference? Thank your planets, my Eyserbeck, that you have never relinquished the holy estate of celibacy. Accept the word of an injured husband, that if a wife can frustrate any scheme of yours, it is her peculiar pride and privilege so to do. Thus am I the victim of a matrimonial weakness. So are we chiefly punished for the most virtuous actions of our lives.

“But to return. Just picture to yourself my position. Was it not extremely galling to reflect, that here was I, chained down to a colloquy of entirely fictitious urgency in an attorney’s office; while a box, likely enough to contain the very proofs I wanted, was at this moment on its way to Garwood, under very slender tutelage? Still, until I knew for certain that my wife had written to Esdaile, I could not connect with absolute conviction this removal and my own private affairs. Again, to take this box *vi et armis* from the fly in open daylight, and attack the clerk in charge, would be only a fool-hardy experiment.

So, with a mighty effort, I curbed my impatience, and discussed fully with the lawyer the question of the Samler *fracas* in all its bearings.

“The advice of Mr. Lucas Raymond was brief and practical ; he suggested that he should see Mrs. Samler forthwith on my behalf, and offer her any sum between one and five pounds, for which she was willing to let the matter between us drop. I was to express regret at having resented too warmly a mere school-boy’s impertinence. On these terms, the lawyer confidently predicted that I should hear no more of this disagreeable subject, except—an important exception—his own little account, which would duly reach my hands at the village inn. So I took my leave with many expressions of gratitude, and gravely gave the lawyer an invitation to visit my—or rather your—country seat, my Eyserbeck, should the track of an autumnal ramble ever lead him to the natural fastnesses of the Tyrol. Thence issuing, I ascertained that the ‘ Headless Woman ’ fly had not yet returned from the Priory, and that

the clerk was Mr. Raymond's nephew. That same night, on his later arrival, I regaled the driver of that vehicle at my own expense, and by judicious questioning elicited these facts, most of which I knew already. First, he, the driver, had heard the Priory butler tell the footman to carry the box up to the 'strong room.' Next, the strong room at the Priory lay at the S.E. extremity of the long library, through which apartment one had to pass to reach its door; and that this door was a cast-iron one, and possessed a highly complicated lock. Further, that priceless treasures of plate, in my informant's estimation, were immured therein. So, to aid my reflective powers, I lit a cigar, and came to two conclusions. I would return to town at once, and tax Julia with having warned Esdaile, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or no she had really done so. Next, if she had, I would at once commence operations against the Garwood strong room, and for that purpose bring down with me from London as a coadjutor, some gentleman of doubtful character,

skilled in the intricacies of lock and key craft.

"*June 9th.*—I am just off. Fancy my oversight last night. But I suppose that I was dull and tired. This morning in bed, I remembered, that, dolt as I was, I was leaving Garwood without reconnoitring the Garwood lodge gate, to see if my permission to sketch was or was not withdrawn. Imagine my forgetting this yesterday. No sooner determined than carried into effect. I bundled on my clothes, and with campstool and portfolio, approached the well-known portals. 'Ho, ho,' I thought, 'this means something,' as instead of the usual apple-cheeked gate-girl, a burly gamekeeper answered my summons.

" 'Let me in, please,' I commence confidently, with a hand on the gate-hasp.

" 'No admission this ere mornin',' is the gruff rejoinder.

" 'But, my good fellow——' I proceed to expostulate.

" 'I ain't *your* good fellow,' retorts the gamekeeper, with a sneering emphasis upon the possessive pronoun.

“ ‘Come, come,’ I persist in a tone of authority. ‘There is a magnificent study in elm foliage still incomplete. Your master would never be such a Vandal as to rob the artistic world of this gem. Besides, I have Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile’s special permission to enter here as I please.’

“ ‘And I’ve the squire’s orders to keep you out,’ he responds insolently, trifling with an ash sapling.

“ ‘Orders given when?’

“ ‘Night afore last. Be off!’

“ ‘Against myself specially?’

“ ‘Agen all manner of tramps and forty-gravers.’

“ ‘You shall repent this!’

“Derisive laughter from the guardian of pheasants. So back I trudge to the ‘Headless Woman.’ †

“This settles the matter. I now discern, beyond all manner of question, the finger of my amiable Julia in this Garwood pie. I may be over-particular, but I own it seems to me hardly delicate that a wife should warn an old admirer against her husband. In Bayswater of the blessed, perhaps, these

things are viewed differently. You have harmed me, little yet, old lady, with your counterplots. Indeed, thanks to my fortunate visit to Raymond, you have played notably into my hands. I now see clearly that my proofs are in that one actual tin box. I now disregard all muniments in the lawyer's custody, and concentrate myself with tenfold energy upon the strong room at the Hall. Many thanks indeed, Mrs. Christopher Bellamy, for rendering your Adonis of the turnips fidgetty at the precise moment, which favoured my schemes most. If I believe in any one thing, I believe in my own luck. Take care, Julia, my destiny will overpower yours. Give me a clear berth, or you may only get yourself crushed. Stand aside, if you are wise; watch the issue, and accept such terms as my clemency is content to allow you, when this assault of arms between Esdaile and myself is done.

"And now for London. My journey thither, just at present, is politic in many aspects. Crass Esdaile will hear I have left the 'Headless Woman,' bag and bag-

gage ; therefore, the simpleton will conclude that the mere precaution of setting a satellite in gaiters to watch the gates of his Eden, has frightened away an old serpent of so many twists and wiles, as your respected friend, my excellent Eyserbeck. Then, besides, I repair to the great commercial centre, to seek out an ally cunning in the science of locks. Lastly, I shall enjoy rating Julia soundly for her ill-timed interference. And, chiefly, I shall be thoroughly thankful to breathe once more the free atmosphere of rascaldom in the great city, and to shake off—if only for a few days—the dust of this miserable and most respectable village !”





CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN WITH A HISTORY.

MY nephew tells me," said Lucas Raymond to his housekeeper, "that you were unwell for a short time yesterday—is this so, Hannah?"

"A kind of sinking faintness," admitted Hannah, with evident reluctance. "It passed off in ten minutes. I expect it was the weather, or a plate of buttered toast."

"You are, luckily for me, very seldom ill," mused Lucas, drawing a chair to the table; "I wonder what we should do, if you were to knock up. I never calculated on this contingency till I heard of your indisposition."

"Never fear, master," interposed Hannah,

taking him up, "I don't mean to be ill. I haven't the time. I'll give Mr. Philip my mind for worrying you with my slight bilious giddiness of yesterday. I am nearly sure, now I think on it, that it was the buttered toast. It shall never occur again."

"Tut, tut," said Lucas, "don't imagine I have spoken reproachfully, or with any idea of reproof. Far from it. You have been invaluable; strong as a horse, patient as a camel, silent as a mouse. We neither of us mean to break up yet, do we, old lady? When we do, the good town of Garwood may break bolt and bar, press in here, overrun the place, and gape at our secret to their hearts' content, as soon as we are cold. I do not suppose we shall either of us greatly care *then*."

"Don't talk like that, master," entreated Hannah with a shudder. "I can make all right and quiet if you die the first. You can do the same by me. The secret is yours, but with long keeping it, I love it like my own."

"Ay, ay," muttered Lucas, biting his nails; "you have watched over my interests

better than twenty men. There is no tenacity like a woman's. I never did a better stroke of business in my life, than when I transplanted you down here, bag and baggage, from that dismal tenement of yours in Barrosa Place, to keep house for me."

"I left London gladly," said Hannah, rubbing her apron between her hands. "I was without friends ; my small legacy from my father was nearly exhausted. My scheme of paying my own rent by letting lodgings had failed. Rates were heavy, lodgers rare. Then you came to be my tenant, and things brightened a bit, until that night, when you brought into my kitchen that boy——"

"Omit that part of the story," interposed Lucas sullenly, bringing his fist down upon the table with a bang. "Break off your memories short at that point. Philip may come plunging in at any moment."

And Lucas Raymond wiped his brow with a pocket-handkerchief, and a pause of some moments ensued.

"I may as well," suggested Hannah, meek and crestfallen at her master's re-

proof, "return to your hands that parcel of shillings."

"A good thought, woman," agreed Lucas, quite calm again; "only don't fumble over it, and reach them me at once."

Hannah produced a brown parcel from a side-pocket in her gown, deftly and swiftly she transferred it to her master's hand.

"See, these," she said softly, "are quite worn and dirty already. You had better get rid of them at once."

"The new ones will not be ready till to-morrow," said Lucas, with a glance at the door. "You can make shift to keep—matters—quiet in the interval."

"I must make shift," responded Hannah with a sour grimace of resignation. "I sha'n't sleep any the better, though, to-night."

"Come, come," pacified Lucas, "I am sorry for my omission. I should have been to the bank, only this foreign fellow disconcerted my plans yesterday."

"What harm did he do you, master?" asked Hannah with a searching glance at her master, and a slight quiver in her eye-lids.

"Harm? Bless the woman!" cried Lucas with a boisterous laugh. "He is not the sort to harm old Lucas. The whole affair was merely ludicrous. The boys had been mobbing and baiting him; and he thrashed one urchin, whose parent threatened him with an action—Mrs. Samler—you know the vixen."

"Oh!" said Hannah, drawing a long breath, "is that all?"

"Still the fool made me forget the bank," resumed Lucas with a shrug of his shoulders. "I say, Hannah, suppose I make a personal remark, should you mind?"

Hannah smiled a sickly feeble negative.

"I think the fire is beginning to tell upon your face," hesitated the lawyer.

"My face is nothing to any one, master," replied Hannah, with a grating laugh and a rapid movement of the hands across her countenance. "I suppose you mean the cooking and the kitchen-fire."

Lucas stared at her for some moments with a puzzled face.

"Hannah," he exclaimed, scratching his head, "you are a complete enigma. Twenty

years of study has made me understand you marvellously little. Sometimes you are literal to a fault, at others figurative and circuitous to a degree. Your nature alternates between excessive candour and unnecessary secretiveness. In fine, I cannot make you out."

"Are you now," demanded Hannah, with a momentary darkening of the face, "harping upon what I said about the cooking?"

"We will not discuss this further," said Lucas, reaching out his hands for a bundle of documents; "you had better go upstairs, and put things a little straight there."

"All is arranged above, quite as you would wish," nodded Hannah, retreating towards the doorway.

"Some day," mused Lucas, biting the end of a pen, "in the three hundred and sixty-five you will forget to secure that door, or I shall leave my key in the lock unturned. The nurseries of this rambling old pile will not guard our secret for ever. Had not Garwood credulity already peopled this mansion with a legion of

ghosts, we should have been betrayed long ago."

"Nothing like a ghost," said Hannah grimly, with her hand on the door-handle, "to keep intrusive neighbours at their proper distance."

"The mere fact," pondered Lucas, biting his lips and furrowing his forehead, "of Philip remaining here all day must increase our risk, though the lad sticks to his desk, and is not given to prying."

"He is never here at night," struck in Hannah significantly. "We could never have him here at night."

"So I foresaw," echoed Lucas, snapping her up, "when I quartered him and his mother above the pickles and loaf-sugar at Evestaff's."

"I consider his mother a fool," observed Hannah in an allusive, sudden, and pithy way.

"Bird-witted," coincided Lucas.

"Lackadaisical," supplemented Hannah.

"She seldom ventures to these doors," said Lucas.

"She thinks you an ogre, master," threw

in Hannah, with her nearest approach to a smile on her thin dry lips.

"And you a ghost," rejoined Lucas, sneeringly. "What makes my nephew late this morning?"

"Perhaps," suggested Hannah with gloomy cynicism, "he has fallen in love."

Philip had already left his quarters above the grocer's, and set out for his uncle's office, but he had fallen in with Edgar Lapworth on his way, and Edgar was in his normal condition of requiring advice and consolation; both of which requisites Philip, to the detriment of his punctuality, found himself called upon to administer in the capacity of Edgar's friend.

"Philip," began Edgar, taking his friend's arm, "I am a thoroughly miserable fellow."

"Far from it," returned Philip encouragingly. "You are a very favoured being. A snug little country practice has dropped into your mouth like a cherry. You sat in your arm-chair and whistled, and a ready-made fortune fluttered down from the clouds, into your lap. Be reasonable, old fellow, and concede at least this."

"I did not allude to medical prospects," interposed Lapworth, gloomily; "they are well enough, but Caroline literally haunts me."

"I fancied you were half-cured, Edgar, in that direction."

"You don't know me," ground out Lapworth between his teeth. "She doesn't know me. She thinks me a social butterfly, while I'm an injured, an ignored, a desperate man."

"Gently, for goodness' sake," entreated his friend, touching Edgar's arm; "just consider, we are in Garwood High Street. Here you are quite a personage; you must really not gesticulate; here are you lord of life and death to this flourishing city and its surrounding district, and you go ranting down the street like a play-actor."

"Don't be hard upon a fellow," pleaded the doctor, lapsing into crest-fallen calmness.

"I declare," said Philip with a laugh, "I begin to wish I had never imported such a volcanic mender of broken bones."

"You don't mean that, Philip?"

"The exact contrary, Edgar."

"I really owe it all to you," faltered Lapworth with a pleasant change of manner, "that I, a foundling and no man's son, should be settled here, creditably, steadily, respectably, earning my bread."

"Chance and accident," disclaimed Philip, passing it off, with airy self-depreciation. "They planted you here. I was merely a very humble actor in the drama. Chance threw the affairs of your insolvent predecessor, Griffin, into my uncle's office at the time of my appearance at Garwood. Accident ordained that Griffin's house was to let, his business was to let, his horse and chaise, his drugs and bottles—all and each to let likewise. In fact, Griffin himself—as represented by his creditors—was to let in the widest acceptation of the term."

"But you suggested my name, Philip. That set the wheels of good-luck moving in my direction."

"So could a parrot have done. Hear me out. My second morning at my desk my uncle tosses me across Griffin's schedule of debts as a little light and easy legal pap-

meat appropriate to the mental digestion of a beginner. 'Here is the plant and goodwill of a devilish nice practice going cheap,' sings out my uncle from his inner sanctum; 'people are shy about this because Griffin has just failed in it. So would any practice cease to pay, if the practitioner ceases normally to be sober. You have no friend in town likely to take it, I suppose?' 'Yes,' I replied simply, 'I think I have.' 'Name?' enquired he. 'Lapworth,' I rejoined. 'Write to him,' he advised. I did. Here you are."

And Philip, by way of conclusion, slapped his friend on the back and bade him cheer up emphatically.

"Let us not forget Mr. Padfield, my guardian's, generosity either," reminded Edgar gratefully.

"He acted like a trump," allowed Philip, "though his voice nearly cracked the windows, and almost killed the flies in our small parlour; and though his bounce and rattle seemed likely to shake down the very gallipots in Eavestaff's windows below. I almost fancied that I had invited an

amiable earthquake in to meat tea on the night of your joint arrival."

"You see," explained Lapworth humbly, "he regards me as one of his theories. So he doesn't mind spending money to keep me going, as a practical illustration of a social law. I am grateful enough I am sure. He adopted several—theories—before myself, but they all of them ran away."

"Ay, ay," said Philip, "though the business did go for an old song, Mr. Padfield had to pay the piping of it, and he did so without a murmur, to do him justice, and I respect him for it."

"The singular part of this affair," resumed Edgar, speaking with evident reluctance, "is, that I should have settled down within four miles of Caroline."

"Meaning Kidston, Edgar?"

"Yes; what am I to do, Philip?"

"Clearly," returned his friend, briskly and conclusively, "consider these four miles—four hundred, if you do not wish to neglect your patients and to follow Griffin's lead into the Court of Bankruptcy. I feel

tempted to paraphrase in your behalf a well-known sentiment of teetotalism, and say, that Cupid has reduced to insolvency as many firms as Bacchus."

"Do be serious," urged Edgar, moodily ; "the matter is almost beyond my option now. A servant is sick at Kidston Manor. I must attend her this very morning. Can I avoid running up against Caroline ? This is the point on which I have been longing to consult you."

"You have been a long while in reaching it," replied Philip, good-humouredly sarcastic.

"Is it not awkward ?" interrupted Lapworth, with a feeble smile of perplexity. "Have I any alternative, when professional duty summons ?"

"Go," decided Philip, reluctantly, "for you must. If you encounter Miss Rutherford, be short and independent with her. She will respect you all the more. Take my word for this."

"Y-yes," assented Edgar with a resolute voice, and an irresolute aspect ; "I don't intend to be put upon. I am a man of the

world now, with a recognized status and position. Caroline had better not endeavour to trifle with me in her old way."

But Edgar never told his friend, that this would be his third visit to the manor to attend the sick housemaid. Neither did he think it necessary to enlighten Philip on this further point; that, though Caroline was in the house, he had been twice within the Kidston walls without seeing her. In his visits to great Cropshire houses, it was etiquette for the doctor to draw up his gig at the kitchen door, and to depart by the same egress. Unless 'the quality' were ill, he never saw the quality in his visits. The village doctor and the village butcher were considered as about socially equal. Edgar did not care to tell Philip this, nor that he intended, on his third visit, to employ stratagem to gain an interview with Caroline.

"N-no," repeated Edgar moodily, throwing back his head, "I mean to speak up to her—this time!"

"But avoid her if you can," added Philip, seriously. "And now please step out, for

I shall be notably late at office this morning."

"Do you like the law?"

"Yes."

"And your uncle?"

"Y-yes."

"A long-drawn affirmative," commented Edgar, with a glance at his friend, "meaning you do not like him much."

"I tell you," repeated Philip, a little snappishly, "that I like my uncle well enough, only——"

"I suspected," chimed in Edgar, "that we should arrive at an 'if' or an 'only' in our predilections."

"It is little enough to have to complain of," proceeded Philip, dragging his friend along at full speed; "only my uncle and his housekeeper have such a stealthy way of doing the most common-place things. They move about like two cats, and never tell you anything without leaving the impression on your mind, that they are suppressing more than they communicate."

"All your fancy," rallied Edgar, in turn. "I shall have to treat you for hypochondria

soon. You will tell me that you have seen the vicarage ghost next. Believe me, it is a spectre of excellent credentials, and well-vouched-for authenticity."

"No," remarked Philip, firmly; "the atmosphere of my uncle's house is not a ghostly, but rather—if I must fit a word to it—a criminal one. I am going to be absurd; but suppose an old wood-cutter and his wife, in a lonely cottage, in a dense forest, who had murdered a traveller; and, for some inconceivable reason, kept the body for many years unburied above-stairs. Well, during this time, I should imagine, these two peasants would be, in manner and general ways, exactly similar to the highly-respected Mr. Lucas Raymond, the leading attorney of Garwood, and his model housekeeper, Mrs. Hannah Armitage."

Edgar eyed his friend in sheer amazement, after this descriptive outburst.

"Are you joking, Philip?" he demanded, "or are you in earnest?"

"Hang me, if I know which," replied Philip, curtly breaking from him. "Here

we are, old fellow, so good-bye, and take care of yourself at Kidston."

"Take care of yourself, Philip," murmured the doctor, after his friend's disappearing form; "for you are either bilious with too much desk-work, or your lines have been cast in very strange borders indeed."





CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR AND THE CONSTABLES.

IT is not fair to way-lay me in this manner," complained Caroline Rutherford, drawing herself up; "you may put me wrong with my aunt; you don't know how punctilious she is."

"I know," rejoined Lapworth, "that I have been twice under the same roof without seeing you once. Human patience could not endure a third disappointment."

The scene was a corridor at Kidston Manor, in a dim corner of which Caroline and the doctor were conversing in hurried whispers.

"So you selfishly expose me to miscon-

ception before the people here," pouted Caroline, with a slight appeal to her handkerchief, and a decided flash of anger in her eyes, as she replaced it in her side pocket.

"I utterly deny so rash an imputation," replied Lapworth, emphatically; "why may I not even address you? What have I done since we met in Cherry Terrace, to make you so distant?"

"Because—we are in Cropshire," hesitated Miss Rutherford, by way of reply.

"We have taken many a walk in Holloway," repeated Edgar, endeavouring to take her hand; "there was nothing said about misconception there."

Caroline snatched away her fingers with a gesture of offended dignity, and again drew herself up to her full height.

"This is not Holloway, sir," she rebuked, with a quiver of self-assertion in her voice; "this is Kidston Manor—my uncle's seat."

"Therefore," remonstrated Edgar, in bitterness of spirit, "we must throw over old friends. Is not this rather worldly, eh, Caroline?"

"I won't be lectured!" she exclaimed, with a quick quiver of the eye-brows; "you have no right to lecture me—none."

"Does my—attachment to you give me no right?" pleaded Edgar, biting his lips, and looking aside from the offended damsel.

"I will not have this nonsense even alluded to here," she interrupted, with a petulant stamp of the foot.

"Mentioned or ignored," the doctor suggested, with a certain mild perseverance, "the fact remains."

"I shall appeal to my uncle," continued Caroline, ruthlessly, and her lip curled as she said it, "if you persist in forcing your attentions upon me."

"Caroline!" appealed Lapworth, dropping his hat, and arousing the echoes of the Kidston corridor, "believe at least in my sincere despair, at seeing you adopt the social fictions of these narrow Cropshire squires. Indeed, you are worthy of better things!"

"You came here to doctor a housemaid," resumed Miss Rutherford sarcastically, after a momentary pause, during which she

had observed her suitor with sardonic indifference.

"Certainly," was the rejoinder.

"Have you done so?"

"I have done my best."

"Then, speaking for my uncle," she went on with the most frozen civility, "I think, Mr. Lapworth, we need not detain you further."

"Do you say this from the heart, Caroline?"

"I am perfectly serious," with her bitterest smile.

"That hardly answers my question," expostulated Edgar, smoothing his hat round. "Are your feelings really changed, or is this a mere temporary phase of concession to the prejudices of your purse-proud relatives? I assure you, in my village rounds, I hear only one verdict on these Rutherfords."

"And I listen to no second-hand gossip," ran the young lady's icy reproof. "To hear my kin abused by some hen-wife is bearable, to hear the doctor retail her censure is not."

"Neither shall you," he interposed, curbing his vexation with an effort. "But let the general verdict teach you thus far at least, that your hold upon the favour of such people as these is likely to be precarious in the extreme."

"Proceed, sir," commanded Caroline, with a keen glance at the speaker, "proceed, since you compel me to listen. I have given your remark my attention; now, pray, assist me to any inference which you desire these sage reflections to suggest to my unenlightened mind."

"Don't be flippant, Caroline," said the doctor, with a look of entreaty. "You catch my drift, though you feign blindness. I mean merely this, that another fortnight may see you back in our much-despised Holloway. You see I am frank."

"I see you are—impertinent," echoed Caroline, turning away with a frown and a jerk of disdain.

"Good Heavens!" murmured Lapworth vehemently, twisting his hands alternately into each other, "is this a time for ceremony? I am anxious about you, and you

repel me. These relatives were strangers to you a month back. I have excellent means of knowing them, worldly, insolent, capricious. How have they treated your father? Ah! Caroline, cast me off, if you please, on the ground of my own manifold shortcomings, but not because the fickle sunshine of a Cropshire squire's favour has chosen to patronize you!"

"You are eloquent this morning, Mr. Lapworth," commented Caroline, superciliously raising her eyebrows; "but your metaphors need pruning. Their exuberance outruns the prosaic reality. Cannot an uncle ask his niece on a visit without being denounced in all this whirlwind and thunder?"

"Ridicule myself, if you please," returned Lapworth humbly, "so long as you receive my advice."

"And, suppose I *am* sent back to Holloway," reverted Caroline snappishly, "well, what then, sir?"

"Merely this," admitted Edgar, rather unguardedly, "I shall be in Holloway no longer."

Caroline saw her opportunity, and responded with prompt malice and spiteful emphasis—

“Then Holloway will be one trifle more endurable from that circumstance. You see, I can be frank like other people.”

“Yes,” agreed Edgar with a sigh, “frank enough, and very bitter, to indulge yourself in the momentary gratification of a smart and flippant rejoinder.”

“If I am bitter,” interposed Caroline, “you are inconsiderate. You detain me in one of the main thoroughfares of this place, where every passing servant is able to comment, what earthly object the niece of the house can have in gossiping with the village apothecary.”

“I go at once,” conceded the doctor, with a searching glance up and down the corridor, “only consent to meet me on some other day, and in some more suitable environment.”

“How can I?” protested Miss Rutherford in petulant volubility. “All the afternoon we are out in the barouche; the whole morning is engrossed by crochet,

worsted-work, or other feminine devices. A girl in a country house is never left an instant to herself. How can I come, supposing even I had any inclination for the meeting?"

"There is an old proverb," hinted Edgar shyly, placing his fingers before his mouth as he enunciated it, "about a will and a way."

"I have neither," observed Miss Rutherford pithily. "Now, please, go, because there are visitors to lunch. Mr. Bramley came yesterday, and a host more are expected this morning."

The emphasis which Caroline laid upon the name of Gilbert Bramley could not be wholly unintentional. Young ladies seldom act, even in the merest trifles, without a definite effect in view. Be this as it may, the shaft went home, whether aimed or random, and Edgar Lapworth had to overcome a tremulous working of his underlip before he managed to falter out, with an obvious effort—

"I will not detain you from these agreeable people."

Caroline smiled demurely at the effect which she had produced.

"Yes," she returned, following up her advantage, "Mr. Bramley *is* agreeable. You are perfectly right."

Here Lapworth, with difficulty restraining himself, broke in vehemently—

"Pleasant enough," he insisted bitterly, "and unprincipled enough behind all that glossy surface of pleasantness and *bonhomie*. Good heavens, Caroline, do not allow that man, of all men, to pay you attentions!"

"Here is an outburst indeed," commented Caroline, with a dry disdainful laugh.

"On some subjects it is right to be warm," continued Edgar in hurried earnestness. "I should wish no sister of mine to be intimate with this fellow. I can call him nothing else, in spite of his park and his rent-roll—though good looks and eight thousand a year do manage to cover a multitude of sins with most people."

"My aunt speaks extremely well of Mr. Bramley," she threw in obstinately.

"Pardor: me, she only commends his acres and his income," he explained.

"Let me compliment you," answered

Caroline, with icy approval, "on having mastered during a sojourn marvellously short the local habit in Garwood of sparing no one's character. You are almost a native in this respect. Dear me!"

"Alas!" enunciated the doctor with a growing touch of sadness in his manner, "these are hard facts, matters of actual judicial record."

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Miss Rutherford, with a slight loss of composure, beginning, in spite of herself, to look more convinced; "Mr. Bramley is my especial friend."

"Of how long standing, Caroline?"

"I insist upon your speaking out, Mr. Lapworth."

"I cannot—to a young lady."

"Let us drop the subject, then," murmured Caroline, now positively uneasy, blending a restless haste with the emphasis of her injunction.

"By all means," agreed the doctor, with an expression of relief. "But if you wish to know more—I warn you, it is a story neither pleasant nor suitable for you—ask

Miss Klein, the governess here, a nice little body. She told me that she intended to take some broth to a cottage, where she cannot well fail to learn the whole history. The peasantry about here have hardly any reticence, even upon the subject of their own disasters."

"You are very tiresome and meddling," scolded Caroline, with a pout on her lips; "you have made me feel thoroughly uncomfortable. If this confession of mine causes you any sense of triumph, you are welcome to the miserable advantage."

"You do me great injustice," reasoned the doctor; and this time he took her hand, and it was not instantly withdrawn. "I was really most reluctant to hint at this scandal in your presence. But, as you have no brother, as your aunt is worldly, and your father a recluse and far away from you; I have risked seeming in your eyes the mean detractor of a man in all external advantages my superior; to supply you with a timely warning, I have undertaken the unpleasant office of a meddler and a spy."

"I suppose I ought to be obliged to you," murmured Caroline, with an expression of countenance which seemed anything but grateful, and full of keen disappointment.

"Don't say that," expostulated Edgar ; "and now good-bye. You cannot think how this glimpse of you has cheered me up. I shall face my work henceforward in better heart for many days. It is work, believe me, in earnest."

"I think," she said, very quietly, yet with a sudden change of manner for all that, "that yours is a most creditable career."

Edgar looked extremely delighted at this not very rapturous commendation, and he took courage to observe—

"I must see this housemaid again on Wednesday. I shall walk over, and not drive, about noon. Could you not, for pity's sake, take a morning 'constitutional' towards the lodge-gates about that time?"

Caroline hesitated, and began to bite her lips.

"I can give no answer," she said at last, abruptly.

"And no denial," added Edgar, impetuously; "that is quite enough, Caroline. Say no more. I will be there, upon the chance."

"And now go," persuaded Miss Rutherford, this time not altogether unkindly.

"Do let me speak one last word on my own behalf," said Lapworth, lowering his voice. "I will do so as modestly as I can. My position is now a recognised one, and I am doing well. The responsibility of the last few weeks has added years of experience to my life. I have outgrown the raw medical student, who used to pester you in Holloway days——"

"There—there," interrupted Caroline, with a fidgety smile; "don't be tiresome, and do get away before anybody sees you!"

"Caroline," persisted Edgar, with heightened colour, "I do not pretend, that I can offer you anything like the position of your uncle's niece; but I perhaps can improve your condition as your father's daughter, and even make him more comfortable as well."

Miss Rutherford began to twist about a little locket, which she wore upon her neck, and she could only echo her previous suggestion, in a hardly audible voice,—

“Do go away.”

“I am incredulous,” Lapworth resumed, “as to the enduring quality of your uncle’s favour. Therefore, even in this fine house, among all these servants, I, the mere country doctor, venture to renew my suit. Your uncle’s caprice may, at any given moment, make all this plate, lacquer, and upholstery, mere vapour and smoke, as regards yourself personally.”

“Some one will certainly come,” repeated Caroline, with a little gesture of mock despair. “Oh, why will you not depart?”

“But,” persisted Edgar, with a flash of self-assertion, “as to your finding a more eligible admirer among the young squires round about; from all the specimens I have hitherto seen, I feel less and less disposed to retire in any one’s favour. This Bramley is, in many respects, the best; yet he would break any sensitive wife’s heart, not by

actual brutality, but by mere want of principle, and neglect."

"Don't recur to Mr. Bramley," said Caroline, with a shiver.

"Now, I am really off," pursued Lapworth, with a nod and a smile, "until next Wednesday, then?"

"I can give no promise; good-bye."

"I quite understand you, Caroline," concluded the doctor; "unkindly as we began, we have ended a little better; good-bye!"

So they separated; and Caroline barely saved her distance at the manorial luncheon-table. While Edgar Lapworth issued from the kitchen-door, mounted his gig, flicked his raw-boned steed with the Roman nose, and drove back in heightened spirits to Garwood.

As Lapworth's gig passed the door of the "Headless Woman," some one exclaimed, "There goes the doctor."

This was an ordinary remark enough, but the personage who made it considered himself a very remarkable man. We cannot be always brilliant; and certainly Inspector Bradbeer, of the Garwood police,

was no exception to the general axiom, which we have ventured to lay down, on this occasion.

"I said," repeated Inspector Bradbeer, with an accession of asperity, "there goes the doctor."

At this second intimation, policeman Culf, who had dozed upon one of the ale-house benches, woke up, and yawning somnolently, coincided with his superior.

"I see him fast enough."

Now, Inspector Bradbeer was a notable in Garwood village. If he did not do very much, at least he looked extremely imposing. He lived in a block of reiterated villas. His own domicile was labelled over its parlour window, "County Constabulary." He was a ponderous, pompous, hazy fellow, buttoned up to the chin, with round patches of protrusive whisker at each corner of his mouth. We may remember him in the Chelsea Police Court, twenty-two years back. Since that time, his increasing portliness had rendered his 'translation' to an easier berth in the rural districts imperative. His chief merit lay in being

able to do nearly nothing with the most imposing grace in the world. The village community had a general belief, which he sedulously fostered, that he was rather over-worked by Government. His beat lay between his own doorstep and the bar of the "Headless Woman." He seldom deviated from this beaten track, save on the rarest emergencies.

Bradbeer always maintained that no policeman was of use, except it was known precisely where, at any given moment, he could be found. He therefore made his own life a beautiful exemplification of this theory. If Bradbeer was not in his own parlour, he was mounting guard before the horse-trough of the "Headless Woman," or snugly esconced in the bar of that establishment. If Bradbeer was not in these places, he was on his way from his home to the hostelry ; or conversely returning from the public-house to his own fire-side.

But, reminds the reader, the police of Garwood could not have been an absolute sinecure ; and our candid reader is right.

Emergencies did arise. A carter got

drunk, a schoolboy threw stones, a cow strayed, a squire lost his dog. These were all, as a matter of fact, cases for the rural police. Mr. Esdaile did not preserve, or we might have added the duty of an extra and unpaid gamekeeper to this list. But Inspector Bradbeer was too great a man to leave "head-quarters" (described above), short of a French invasion, or a general Fenian rising. So he delegated such scraps of active duty as did arise to his assistant and underling, Policeman Culf.

But even Culf had long intervals of leisure, and, when not specially employed, it was the will and pleasure of his superior that Culf should personally attend him, the inspector, as a kind of gentleman in waiting at his heels.

The inspector justified this on public grounds, by proving that the sight of two united policemen inspired more confidence in the public mind, than a single member of the force in one place, and his duplicate in another spot far removed. But, in truth, Bradbeer required a humble recipient of his views on things in general, which were, at

any rate, lengthy and copious. And Bradbeer felt seldom comfortable unless his shadow Culf were within hail. He felt, as it were, cold without the neighbouring atmosphere of his satellite. And one good reason lay in this fact, that when Culf was near, and there arose anything to be done, Bradbeer could send Culf to do it. When Culf was absent, Bradbeer, the majestic, had to do it himself. Now, Bradbeer did not like this, for Bradbeer was about the laziest soul alive.

A little more Garwood geography here.

The High Street, as we know, bisected the village. The Blackwater Road cut the High Street at right angles, through about the deepest portion of the town. Therefore, Garwood might be meted into four quarters, each bounded on two sides by turnpike roads. Well, at the confluence of these four ways, stood the market cross. The cross itself had long since disappeared, but the square basement of steps, on which the emblem used to rest, remained. The "Headless Woman" faced the market-cross. Here the tide of Garwood life ran busiest.

Here the country women came in once a week, in red cloaks, to sell their eggs and butter. Here, last and not least, Culf and Bradbeer usually lounged. The white days in the calendar of these officials' existence were those upon which, at six weeks' interval, the petty sessions were held in the little market-house, with its steep, picturesque roof. This building lay about one hundred yards from the "Headless Woman," and commanded a northern aspect. Here, on the occasions above stated, Esdaile, Rutherford, Bramley, and three or four other local magnates (with whom these pages have no concern), administered justice indifferently to all comers. At one petty-sessional meeting, a few months back, Bramley was fain to absent himself from the bench ; but to this occurrence we shall allude in due course more specially.

At these judicial gatherings, Inspector Bradbeer was extremely great, and correspondingly hazy. The three things in which Bradbeer most firmly believed, were the Church, the Queen, and his own acute-

ness. Bradbeer possessed considerable influence with the Bench ; but the ruling spirit was Lucas Raymond, the magistrates' clerk. Therefore Bradbeer disliked Lucas, and was extremely jealous of his ascendancy.

Let us dismiss topography, and resume dialogue.

So Culf opened his sleepy eyes, and mumbled—

“ I see the doctor fast enough.”

“ He has been Kidston way,” hazarded Bradbeer, with a sagacious leer.

There was nothing to look the least sagacious in the matter ; but Bradbeer liked looking sagacious on all possible occasions.

“ Or may be, up to the Priory,” said Culf, spitting beneath his raised fingers parenthetically at a fly on the wall.

“ His horse's coat is turned too much for the Priory distance,” argued Bradbeer, winking one eye.

Culf was too much impressed by the astuteness of his superior officer to make any prompt rejoinder, so he drew a long breath, and only said—

"Ah, indeed, I never thought of that."

"It were not to be expected of you, Culf," explained the inspector, with much affable condescension, "not being London-bred."

Culf shook his head, in forlorn acknowledgment of his unfortunate nativity.

"Country officers is all very well," propounded Bradbeer, in a tone of judicial fairness, "in their place, and on country cases. But to reckon up larcenies and such, town and foreign; give me some one who has smelt the Thames, as he played at his youthful marbles."

"Well," pleaded Culf, with an effort at cheerfulness, "we can't all be Londoners."

The inspector rather resented this feeble effort of his subordinate's to shift upon destiny the responsibility of Culf's own rurality; so he proceeded to crush Culf at once, by premising—

"Providence knows very well which chaps are fit to be born in London, and which are only good enough for the districts."

Culf felt himself clearly demolished, and

in a submissive cough, confessed his own preordained stupidity.

Bradbeer was instantly propitiated, and resumed his tone of easy and friendly patronage. After a pause, he again commenced the conversation, in a sentence, conditional, fragmentary, and vague, such as the inspector's heart really loved—

“If a man has been upon one's mind for better than a fortnight, and then chooses to pack up——”

“Meaning the doctor?” supplied Culf, in humble perplexity.

“Meaning the fiddle,” retorted Bradbeer, irately; “who went to mention the doctor?”

“You did ten minutes gone,” from Culf, apologetically.

“Ah, but I've thought a deal since then,” rejoined Bradbeer, in quiet triumph. “I don't expect you to keep up with me. I ain't so inconsiderate. One pace for the dray-horse, say I, and another for the thorough-bred. No, no, my friend; I was thinking of this rattling, bouncing Eyserbeck.”

"I'm glad he's gone," reflected Culf, chewing a straw, "if only to quiet Mrs. Samler."

"Ah," said Bradbeer, snapping him up disdainfully, "that's all you know about it, or him, I'll be bound!"

"I know besides!" exclaimed Culf, driven to a certain mild exasperation, "that you give it out yourself, in the bar there, that you never expected this blustering party to pay his bill. He has paid it though—every stiver; who is wrong now?"

"Not me, for one!" cried Bradbeer, with a defiance, both of grammar and his subordinate. "This party is a deep party. He pays to throw dust in our eyes. We don't often get this sort down here. You must go to Chelsea, my friend, to fathom him. You will light upon his marrow there, easy enough. He is beyond you, Culf, being country-bred."

"He has done nothing," insisted Culf, with a mildly mutinous attempt to hold his own.

"He's a foreigner," remarked Bradbeer,

conclusively cutting away the ground from Culf's feet. "What's the use of saying he has done nothing, when he is a foreigner all the time?"

"There is something in that," vacillated Culf, with a wavering disposition to desert his guns.

"Culf," spoke the inspector, as though appealing to his comrade's better nature, "don't you go setting up for a Solomon, for it won't do. It ain't in you, and will never answer. Now, you listen to me."

Indeed Culf's chief duty lay in this, to sit at the inspector's feet, and receive his oracular wisdom.

"In the first place," propounded Bradbeer, marking emphasis with a dirty forefinger, "this party is a foreigner, and foreigners have always something wrong about them, or why should they leave their own country?"

"Where is that?" interrogated Culf, with some want of intelligence.

"Abroad—continent—foreign parts," explained Bradbeer, with a vague circulating motion of his arm to indicate space;

"they haven't got any exact name for it. That is where these fellows come from. This particular rascal hails from Germany, where they make the sham silver spoons. A nice set they must be there!"

"What did this party want at the 'Headless Woman?'" suggested Culf, catching a blue-bottle on the horse-trough.

"Don't you cut in," pursued Bradbeer majestically, "and I'll tell you by degrees. I drew him into conversation in an easy unprofessional manner. I hoped he didn't find the village dull, as there was not much stirring there on most days. I put it to him so as not to rouse his suspicions, you see, Culf, quite natural—in the way we used to handle this kind of subject down at Chelsea."

"What said he to this?" enquired Culf, leaning down to dust the seams of his blue overalls.

"He told me," narrated Bradbeer, "that the duller the place the better for his pursuits, and that he had come down to make pictures of trees."

"And you believed him,?" from Culf, in an undecided whisper.

"I did not," avowed Bradbeer in reproachful ponderosity. "I was not so soft as that."

"So I supposed," agreed Culf, who had rather expected a contrary answer. "Well, give us your second reason, Mr. Bradbeer."

"What were my first one?" pondered Bradbeer hazily, changing his position.

"His being furrin." We write the word as it came from Mr. Culf's lips.

"To be sure," went on Bradbeer volubly: "Then, secondly, he is one of your scratchers and scribblers; and, thirdly, he has a supercilious way of looking about him, and pretending not to see—a officer; and, fourthly, I never liked the lines of him from the first; and, fifthly, Mr. Esdaile told me to keep my eye upon him—stay a minute, I wasn't to have told you that, my friend, but you go hurrying of me on, and I forgot myself."

"I can hold my tongue," muttered Culf, with a snarl of offence. "Why wasn't I to be told?"

"Because you're a subordinate," observed Bradbeer blandly. "Now in Chelsea——"

"Bother Chelsea!" from Culf, sullenly and testily.

Bradbeer looked both shocked and surprised.

"This comes of taking a subordinate into one's confidence," he murmured, addressing the ale-house bench. "You can't say a word to these country juniors without their jumping down your throat and getting uppish."

Culf began to feel that he had gone too far.

"Tell us how this party got away?" he resumed in a propitiatory manner.

"He made no secret," recounted Bradbeer, mollified, "not he. Off he goes, as brazen as he came. Jack, the flyman, carried up his portmanteau. His bill was paid, and he remembers something handsome for the chambermaid. He went away in open day, and I couldn't arrest him, even on suspicion——"

Here Culf made a suggestion.

"Have you searched his bedroom at the 'Headless?' "

Now this idea pleased Bradbeer much ; but it would never do to allow Culf to believe, that the honour of originating the search rested with a subordinate ; so the inspector at once appropriated the idea as his own, and he murmured to Culf, with assumed indifference—

“ In good time, my boy, in good time.”

“ Then you meant to turn this foreigner’s room over ?” enquired Culf, surprised and rather crest-fallen that Bradbeer should treat this brilliant inspiration as a mere matter of routine. “ How long have you thought of this game of hide and seek in the ‘ furriner’s ’ attic ?”

“ Hours since,” replied Bradbeer, with pompous mendacity. “ Do I know my dooty, young man, or do I not ?”

Now this last aspect of the case made it nearly impossible for Culf to claim any priority for himself in the suggestion above stated ; so the underling merely growled out—

“ You might have mentioned it, though, since you are so quick and clever.”

“ I were waiting,” returned Bradbeer ;

with a saturnine grin, "to see how long *you* would be before it struck you. You let a young pointer find a dead bird for himself, though you see plain enough where it lays all along. It teaches him, and the time isn't lost, and that is the way I educate my country juniors."

"You're uncommon kind," sneered the younger policeman, lapsing into dogged gloominess.

"I am that," nodded Bradbeer in jovial effrontery; "and, besides teaching you, I've been follering out a train of circumstantial evidence in my head all this mortal morning. I dessay, as I've been leaning against these rails,—I will be bound, you fancied I was doing nothing."

"A many more besides me might have thought that," agreed Culf, with some tinge of caustic irony.

"Ah, but I was desperate busy," explained Bradbeer, wiping his forehead. "Busy in the brain. That's the work to wear a man to shadows."

Certainly Inspector Bradbeer's friends might comfort themselves, that there was

no immediate peril of his becoming so reduced. Culf, still unconvinced, demanded in a gruff bantering voice—

“What was it all about?”

Bradbeer, before replying, looked mysteriously up the High Street, then he glanced down it; and, at last, leaning his mouth to Bradbeer’s ear, delivered himself, in a hoarse voice, of this single terrible word—

“Duffers!”

Then he produced a battered sixpenny-piece with a notably spurious look, and clinched the matter by handing it over to his associate.

“This was never made in Garwood,” gasped Culf, smearing the coin over with one sleeve, and then stooping to ring it on the pavement.

“It were,” said Bradbeer, frowning ominously. “I know the party that made it, least ways, uttered it, and a most respectable party it is.”

“A house-holder?” hazarded his junior, with a look of dismay; “don’t say a house-holder!”

"Make your 'holder,' into 'keeper,'" rejoined Bradbeer, with a chuckle at his own enigmatical facetiousness, "and you might have guessed worse."

"Do I know the man?" asked Culf in great perplexity.

"You do not know the *man*," echoed Bradbeer, ending with an emphasis.

"Lord bless me!" from Culf, amazedly.

"I decline," pursued Bradbeer loftily, with an airy wave of the hand, "to explain myself further. It requires the tact, the sagacity, the perspicacity of a London-born official to handle such a case as this in its beginnings. When it is ripe for such as you, Culf, you shall be called in. Meantime, let me remark, that the undivided responsibility of this business is wearing me steadily down. I shall bear up as long as I can, as a matter of public dooty."

And Bradbeer for the second time proceeded to wipe his streaming forehead, and ominously shook his head, as if to predict that he must soon succumb to his zeal in the service of the state. Culf imitated the

gesture with equal gravity, but made no verbal suggestion.

"And now," reverted the inspector, with the air of a cabinet minister, who was dismissing state secrets with an effort, "we will, by way of a little light work, go up and rummage over this foreign rascal's bedroom, as I said we had better do."

"Please, Mr. Bradbeer," interposed Culf, humbly, "I daresay you thought it, but I said it first, anyhow."

"Well, well, my good fellow," answered Bradbeer, with careless condescension, "have it your own way. We shall not find much, take my word for it."

The constables were such tame birds, inside and outside the inn, that their entrance, so far from creating any comment, seemed a most ordinary and natural circumstance.

Having ascended to the chamber lately occupied by our friend Christopher, Bradbeer locked the door on the inside in a business-like manner, and then the search commenced.

"I have found a tooth-pick," said Brad-



beer, with some triumph, pushing his head out from a dive under the fringes of the bed-furniture. "That shows his teeth are bad."

"And a piece of India-rubber," said Culf, holding it down to the kneeling inspector's face, as if he were feeding a dog.

"A broken comb with three of the teeth gone," pursued Bradbeer, once more partially emerging to exhibit his relic. "I think I will make a note of the exact number of missing teeth when I come out."

And Bradbeer, diving again, was lost to view.

Meanwhile, Culf had removed an ornamental summer apron from the grate, and fished out from behind it some paper crumpled up into a very tight ball. This he smoothed out again gradually on a dressing-table near the window.

"Why," said Culf, using one hand like a flat iron up and down the sheet, "this foreign fellow must have been an architect."

"Don't be a fool, Culf," subterraneously from beneath the bed.

"Wait till you see this," persisted his subordinate, ironing away with increased vigour; "here is a rough ground-plan he has been a-making for some house or other he is going to build."

This brought Bradbeer to the surface at once with a bounce, and he came up struggling and sneezing on to his feet in a very cobweby condition, and glanced over Culf's shoulder at the paper.

Suddenly the inspector turned very pale, and then sank down plump upon the bed with a shock which made all the little wooden balls, which fringed the top, rattle most furiously.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Bradbeer, faintly fanning himself with a bed-curtain, "why this is a gimleting, murdering, massacring, house-bursting burglar!"

"Rubbish," said Culf, beginning to lose faith in the inspector's prevision.

"Why, you dolt, it's the ground-plan of Garwood Priory," panted Bradbeer, nearly frenzied with excitement; "that there little

room marked so black in the corner, is where the squire keeps all his plate."

Culf now became in turn rigid with astonishment.

"He said he came to draw the trees," was all that the junior policeman could ejaculate.

"He could not deceive me," cried Bradbeer, wildly waving his arms like a windmill. "If I did not actually say he was a burglar, I used words to that effect, and used them publicly in the bar below, and I'm glad I did so; and every unprejudiced person will bear me out in what I meant, though, I daresay, some people will be jealous enough, and want to make themselves out twice as clever."

"You said you did not like his looks," allowed Culf, rather dubiously.

"Now don't you try to explain it away," struck in Bradbeer, with rising irritation; "what I said I said, and there are those who can prove it. And now give me hold of this precious sheet of paper, for I must carry it up to the squire at the Priory before many minutes are over."

Here Bradbeer made a sudden snatch at the document, but Culf was just in time to anticipate him.

"Fair play, Mr. Bradbeer," he expostulated, keeping his chief at bay with one hand, "fair play! I found this, and you did not. Consequently, I takes it up to the squire, and you come or not as you are minded."

"Ah!" protested Bradbeer, loftily, to the bedstead, "if any one had told me, that a boy I almost reared, that a lad I brought into the force, and saw him measured for his clothes, a youth whom I superintended when he arrested his first case of drunkenness—if any one had told me, that this boy would grow up a prey to a miserable jealousy of that fatherly guardian, I should have said, 'No, sir, Culf may be countrified, but he is not ungenerous!'"

"You're worse!" shouted Culf, menacing and mutinous. "It stands to reason that, when the squire sees this, something may come of it—something will come of it—in drink or acknowledgment. Now

whose is the drink, whose the gratuity? The finder's to be sure! You dived under beds for tooth-picks, you did. Take these up to the squire if you must take your findings, and see what he will stand for *them*."

Culf, having thus spoken savagely, flung his deference to Bradbeer to the winds, and even snapped his fingers under the inspector's nose, in a manner at once truculent and defiant. Then Culf strode sturdily to the door and unlocked it, clattered down the wooden stairs, and passed out. Here he only paused a moment, and off he set at a great pace for the Priory. Bradbeer followed him closely, and clung to his heels. For once the village saw its two policemen really in a hurry. Bradbeer paced along, short of wind, and equally short of temper. Bradbeer was amazed, petrified, astounded by Culf's ingratitude and insubordination. Still the inspector determined to shear Culf of some plume of his announcement, by appearing simultaneously in Mr. Esdaile's presence. Culf, he reflected, was slow of

tongue; could he only draw the squire aside, Bradbeer would readily convince him of one fact, namely, that Culf had lighted on this plan, when merely acting as a passive instrument under the supervision of a superior official mind.





CHAPTER XII.

DEBT AND DEVOTION.

THE Reverend Paul Wing had dressed himself with peculiar care to dine at the Priory. He had been rather anxious on this particular evening that his toilet should be made without fault or blemish ; success had rewarded his exertions, and he looked very nice indeed in his dress clothes. These were new, and glossy to a fault ; and an agreeable scent of lavender-water pervaded the apartment whenever Mr. Wing moved. Now he was not only scrupulously dressed but he was ready too soon. When the last brush had been given to his whiskers, Mr. Wing's watch still marked fifteen minutes

to the time, when Jack and the Garwood Inn fly had been told to arrive at Mr. Wing's lodgings. It would have been cheaper to walk, but Paul feared for his patent leather boots. Wing was tall and slim, with light brown hair, high cheek-bones, and eyes set too high up in his head, which was flat at the top rather than conical. Consequently the interval of forehead between his eyebrows and the beginning of his hair was greatly abbreviated. The eyes themselves were good, but their expression was scared and uncomfortable. His complexion was fresh and ruddy.

On this special evening, Wing wished to arrive at the Priory, cool and without one curl awry; so, pending Jack's arrival, Paul flung himself on a couch to recover after the fatigues of the toilet.

"I shall see her again, to-night, darling!" he murmured, in a mellow and melancholy voice; "I shall have the supreme felicity of conversing with her, of sitting near her. Is she or is she not unconscious how utterly I adore her? How her footstep heard afar off wakens all the echoes of my soul!

By the way, I might work that into another verse for my ode."

He sighed, and opening his desk, produced a neatly-written sheet of sermon-paper, from which he read as follows :—

" ' Maiden, where the purple pines,
Ripple o'er the glancing fawns,
Where the cloud in broken lines
Mantles o'er the ruby dawns.' "

" You see," he meditated, " ' fawns ' is rather difficult to rhyme to ; still, I was not to be beat, and now it reads very nicely. Only ' the ruby,' and ' mantling,' sound rather bacchanalian. The next verse may stand as it is :—

" ' Pity then ! thy lover waits,
At the early beam he came,
Ere at thy ancestral gates,
Woke the flower that bears thy name.' "

We may remark, parenthetically, that Mr. Wing was anything but an early riser, and few facts would have been more disagreeable to this gentleman than a visit to the Priory Lodge before sun-rise.

" I wonder," he went on, in an injured voice, " if ' The Paddington Magazine ' would send

that back, as they did my last. What can they mean, by saying I write too much like a valentine? Well, I suppose some valentines are well written——”

Here a tap came at the door, followed by the appearance of the landlady's head and arm, the latter reaching out a hamper.

“Your fish, sir, has arrived by passenger train from Blackwater,” explained the head, while the arm deposited the hamper upon the carpet.

“Thank'ee,” replied Wing, indolently, without raising his eyes from the manuscript. “That is quite correct. To-morrow is Friday, to be sure. How the days run — ‘Maiden, where the purple——’”

“I beg your pardon,” hesitated the landlady, “did you address me, sir?”

“Another time, Mrs. Cupper; I am busy now,” from Wing, with some asperity.

“There is two-and-fourpence on the hamper,” persisted the head, with a sigh and a snuffle.

“Then pay it,” from the curate, with a careless wave of the hand, and a petulant twist of his shoulders.

"I have nothing in the house," faltered Mrs. Cupper, reproachfully, "and if it would not be ill-convenient for yourself, Mr. Wing, to settle with me for the last fortnight——"

"Go away," said Wing, querulously; "don't you see I am just going out to dinner, and that I have got my——sermon to finish. 'Purple pines, ripple o'er the glancing fawns.' Do they glance, though? It sounds pretty, anyhow, so let it remain. Thank heaven, that woman has taken herself off. I think, I must have the true poetic gift, because I am so irritable over any interruption. A proof of a delicate organization, this, beyond question. That reminds me, not one word have I penned yet of my next Sunday's discourse. I kept this evening purposely clear to write something this time original and really stirring; when in comes this invitation. I shall end, I suppose, by exhuming as usual, one of my late uncle's compositions. What should I do without his precious legacy of a chest full of sermons? I am resolved, however, never to preach one of these again without

reading it over first. That allusion to Queen Charlotte last Sunday was most unlucky. I had no idea it was coming; and out I brought it before I could stop myself. These ephemeral topics quite spoil the value of a sermon after its first few preachings.—Another interruption. There goes that—well—unpleasant postman. Is there no permissible clerical expletive?"

Mrs. Cupper is again heard heavily panting up the staircase. This time a phantom arm only appears, holding a letter.

"For you, sir."

"Bring it in," commanded Wing, languidly. "I can't reach the thing out there. Do you suppose, Mrs. Cupper, I have arms the length of a windmill's sails? Let me tell you, my good woman, that it disturbs me quite as much to have your head or your arm appearing at the door, as if the rest of your—hem—frame followed in, though you do seem to cherish a fixed delusion to the contrary."

"I will do my endeavour," replied the landlady, humbly, yet with some vague-

ness, as she retired, "to act contrary in future, sir."

"Vexation treads upon vexation," muttered Wing, breaking the seal of the letter. "Here is that pertinacious Westcott, the Oxford tailor, again. How that fellow presses me; notwithstanding all the mints of money which he has wrung from me already. Why was I sent to the university at all? A man of my refinement could only live with the best set. I could not wear coats white at the seams, and square-toed highlows, as my ridiculous allowance plainly required that I should. Well, let us see what this rascal sends me; the old story, I suppose."

The communication which the curate perused, ran as follows:—

"The Reverend Paul Wing, Garwood. Bought of Thomas Westcott, Tailor and Trousers Maker, High Street, Oxford. To bill delivered, ninety-four pounds,—and I say, deliver me from the bill!"

After which feeble joke, Wing yawned, stretched himself, and continued his perusal,

“ ‘To a black diagonal frock coat and D.B. vest’ (what jargon these fellows talk), ‘bound silk braid. To a pair mixed buck and K.M. trousers.’ What hieroglyphics ! I shall read no more. What is the grand total ?—One, twenty, three ; and my annual income is one hundred. Inspiring, very ! Now here comes in Westcott, in person, at the end, as a polite letter-writer. Westcott urges upon me, his dear sir, an immediate settlement. Sanguine Westcott ! He states, that a cheque, crossed to the Oxford and County Bank, during the next few days, would oblige. Hopeful Westcott ! He is unwilling to have recourse to legal remedies. Compassionate Westcott !

“ The wretch has timed the arrival of his extortionate demands with an ingenuity which is actually diabolical. I shall never recover my mental equilibrium in time to make myself the least agreeable at the Priory to-night. So my dun defeats himself, and postpones my chances of ever being able to settle with him. Oh ! the avarice of these tradesmen ! For, just consider, once

engaged to Violet, I could easily pay. The squire is childless, and, by all accounts, munificent. The girl's own fortune must be a pretty penny. So would end the perplexities of Paul Wing; and, if anything were to occur to my absentee vicar, this living would be in the gift of my wife's family.

"There is my fly at last. Behind time, as usual. I must rush down at once and jump in. I feel convinced that this wrist-band shirt-button means to come off during the evening. Another vexation. I wish that I had written my sermon, I wish that I could pay my tailor. But let the smiles of Violet banish these two cares at least for a few hours."

So Jack, the ostler, duly conveyed and safely delivered Paul Wing at the Priory front door. The curate barely saved his distance, for he arrived last, and the guests were just filing in to dinner. With a pang of jealousy he saw Violet allotted to Philip Raymond; had Paul been in time, the church would have been preferred to the law in social precedence, and the curate

would have been paired off with the idol of his affections. As it was, he had to shamble in alone at the end of the procession. Paul invoked silent maledictions on Jack, the ostler, and Mr. Westcott, the dun, they had conspired to make him unpunctual.

The party, beyond the priory house circle, only comprised Basset, Harriet, and Caroline Rutherford; also Gilbert Bramley. The presence of Philip Raymond we have already notified.

Nothing special occurred during the repast itself. The rural Anglo-Saxon dinner-party repeats itself from the Lizard to the Humber. There is a turbot and there are two boiled chickens covered with white sauce. But when the gentlemen had left their wine and rejoined the matrons and damsels in the drawing-room, several dialogues ensued, which, in a measure, influenced the course of this narrative.

Let us listen first to Harriet Rutherford and her husband's nephew.

"Gilbert," beckoned Mrs. Rutherford,

graciously, "can you spare your elderly aunt ten minutes?"

Bramley, coffee-cup in hand, subsided into a vacant corner, beneath the lady's extended flounces.

"It seems hard," smiled the banker's wife, with much archness, "to keep you away from two pretty girls, but I do so want to talk to you."

"I should not wonder," ran Gilbert's mental reflection, "if she was going to lecture me."

"I was pleased to notice," said Harriet, dropping her voice, "how well you and Caroline got on during dinner. Now give me, Gilbert, your frank verdict upon my niece's looks. Just observe what good hair she has. All her own, I assure you, every coil of it. She will take it down, if you like, some day."

"She does very well as girls run," replied Gilbert evasively.

Evidently the subject inspired him with no great enthusiasm.

"Is that all you can say?" exclaimed his questioner with a disappointed look.

"You see, girls are so much alike," commented Bramley, with the utmost languor; "how is a fellow to know? Young ladies of your class seem afraid to speak and to move. Their sentiments on all subjects are exactly the same. They are not good-looking, they are not bad-looking. They want salt. They are vapid. They are very tedious!" and Gilbert smothered a yawn.

"Well," interposed his aunt, raising her hands in dismay, "of all the hopeless subjects this nephew of mine is the most deplorable."

"You stipulated for truth, mind, aunt," he laughed airily, "and when you get it you turn your eyes up."

"A truce to this," said Harriet, becoming serious; "do you know this girl has expectations? At all events, in this respect all young ladies are not alike."

"What is that to me?" returned Bramley, shrugging his shoulders.

"Nephew, it is high time you were married," observed the banker's wife with an emphatic nod.

"Thanks, aunt, I am in no hurry," responded Gilbert, stretching himself lazily.

"People are beginning to talk about you," she insisted, leaning her mouth towards his ear.

"They are very kind," was the imperturbable rejoinder.

"The radical paper last week distinctly glanced at you," continued Harriet with growing earnestness.

"The radical paper be—"

"Silenced," she promptly supplied, "as that journal would be at once, if you married suitably."

"Surely," he expostulated in an ill-used tone, "the geese of this neighbourhood have cackled sufficiently long over my little misadventure. I am certain, there has been fuss enough and fidget enough over this trifle."

His aunt was too politic to contradict him, so she rejoined by at once playing her trump card.

"Gilbert, this girl will have Kidston some day."

Bramley could not repress a keen look

of interest at this most unexpected announcement.

"Yes," said his aunt, seeing her advantage; "and the two estates do lie so nicely together."

"Your niece does not talk as if she were an heiress," remarked Bramley, with assumed carelessness.

"For the best of reasons," replied the banker's wife, with a smile beginning to creep over her face. "Whisper, Gilbert."

"Not know it!" cried Bramley astounded.

"Do not let all the room hear you," scolded Caroline, with an impatient gesture.

"How can this be, aunt?" he asked in a lower tone.

"The story is a long one," narrated the lady with a hand on his wrist; "it is a legal muddle. And now seriously—"

"I am all attention, aunt," answered Bramley, and for once he really looked it.

"The field is clear now," emphasized his aunt with a meaning smile! "but it may not be clear long. If you think that you could bring yourself to like my niece, you had better enter the lists at once."

"This is rather a pistol-to-the-head style of courtship," remarked Gilbert, stirring his coffee like a man at a loss.

"Don't be provoking," exclaimed Harriet, tapping him with her fan. "You know as well as I do, that this girl would be snapped up at once, if a rumour even of her prospects got wind."

"I suppose she would," echoed Bramley resignedly. "Let them snap at her."

"No; do you step in," encouraged his aunt, beaming upon him; "only secure her promise before this secret oozes out, and, above all, don't be dilatory."

"Dilatory, indeed!" protested the young squire, drawing a long face. "Come, that is good. Shall I rush now helter-skelter across the carpet at this niece, seize her by the throat, and shriek out, your promise or your life? Dilatory! By the Lord Harry!"

"Hush! you impetuous boy!" said the banker's wife, putting her hand out. "See how curiously the curate is watching us. Speak as if we were discussing the weather. Avoid vehemence of tone and gesture."

"Nothing can rouse you women," observed Bramley, not over-politely.

"If you lose your temper, Gilbert," interposed Harriet in a reproachful voice, "I have no more to say."


"I can't answer now," complained the young squire, drumming his foot on the carpet. "I want time to turn this well over."

"Now here is Caroline," reverted Mrs. Rutherford, much as an auctioneer might say, "Now here is an excellent rose-wood wardrobe."

"And what flows from that most self-evident assertion?" said Bramley flip-pantly.

"A deluge of reasons," retorted the banker's wife, masking the motion of her lips with her fan; "this girl will have a noble patrimony, is quite sufficiently pretty, believes herself penniless, may be had for the asking."

"By Jove, aunt," remonstrated Gilbert, shaking his head, "it is such a leap in the dark. I will think your scheme over. I can say no more now, can I?"



"Stuff!" said his aunt, biting her lips. "I offer you houses and lands, and you reply that you will consider of it. That is encouraging to me, very!"

"You give me a house," conceded her nephew, with a sarcastic smile, "but it turns out, that there exists a very inconvenient ground-rent upon the property in the form of—hem—a girl."

"You would provoke a saint!" exclaimed Harriet, with a pout. "Go your own way. I give you up."

"My own way," agreed Bramley, coolly, rising, "at present leads me to go across and talk to Miss Caroline."

Which he accordingly did, leaving Mrs. Rutherford greatly in doubt, as to whether she had prospered or had failed in her interview with her nephew.

Pending these diplomatic confidences, the squire and the banker were engaged in earnest colloquy upon the hearthrug.

"A word with you, Rutherford," began the squire, taking the capitalist by the button-hole. "I have been bothered lately by a very curious circumstance."

"Legal," suggested Rutherford, with a pompous smile. "or parochial?"

"Not exactly either," corrected the squire, with a cough of hesitation. "Can you throw your memory back some twenty years?"

Basset Rutherford's face assumed an aspect of deep attention, but he carried it off for the present, by rejoining, with ponderous playfulness—

"That depends: I can't remember my coats and waistcoats of that date, but I can call to mind a clerk or two in the Black-water counting-house."

"You were nearly victimised about that time," continued Esdaile; "and we generally remember the occasions on which we are made fools of."

Rutherford was about to sip his coffee, but he rattled his spoon at this juncture against his coffee-cup, with some want of steadiness of hand.

"Some practical joke," he hazarded, with growing pallor; "that well may be; but I have clean forgotten all about it."

"Do you remember, in the old days,"

prefaced Esdaile, with his fingers on Rutherford's arm, "coming across a scamp by the name of Christopher Bellamy?"

"I have some recollection," gasped Rutherford, faintly.

"Well, I heard lately that he was——"

Here, Esdaile paused, and glanced towards the other guests, to convince himself that no one was listening.

"Dead!" supplied Rutherford, speaking very hoarsely.

"On the contrary," whispered the squire, moodily, "I heard he was in Garwood, under an assumed name."

"God bless my soul!" broke out Rutherford, open-mouthed, at the intelligence.

"But," narrated Esdaile, poisoning his coffee-spoon, "they tell me that he has since disappeared."

"Ah!" said Rutherford, with a very deep breath indeed.

"Warned in time," pursued the squire, a little triumphantly for so meek a person, "I took my precautions quietly, and with promptitude. Bellamy, or Eyserbeck, as he now calls himself, saw he was unmasked,

and that the game was up. He has flown back to London."

"Why did you not have him locked up?" from Rutherford, savagely.

"On what grounds?" reasoned Esdaile. "How could I? This fellow is a bitter bad one; but there is no statute against mere blackguardism and prowling."

"I hoped he was dead," said the owner of Kidston Manor; and he certainly looked as if he spoke sincerely.

"Such fellows possess great vitality," went on the squire, carelessly. "Well, Rutherford, we must keep this visit of Belamy's quiet, for the sake of his—connections (who are, as you know, most highly-respectable people). But I felt bound to put you on the alert; as having failed here, the rascal is likely enough to try you next."

"Indeed," cried Rutherford, twisting about his shoulders uneasily, "that is a vastly comfortable reflection for myself to brood upon."

"I will be bound," observed the squire, smiling good-humouredly, "that, though it

is twenty years ago, you have never since transferred one cheque—you must have had thousands—into the hands of a chance acquaintance. Eh?—come now, confess.”

“Mr. Esdaile!” exclaimed Rutherford, in a menacing voice, “is it your intention to insult me under your own roof?”

“Pooh, pooh, man,” protested the squire, dismayed at the banker’s outburst. “Don’t mind my chaff. Any youngster would have done as you did. Boys will be careless. I don’t blame you. The money I then lost was well spent in teaching me caution, which I sorely required at my start in the world.”

“Pray, excuse my warmth,” expostulated Rutherford, cooling down a little; “but even at this distance of time, I cannot be calm upon this subject. I shudder to reflect that an imputation *might* have rested upon my character for my whole life, owing to the careless, boyish good nature of a single moment. Under these circumstances, a man may be excused for losing his self-control.”

“Your warmth does you credit,” said the

squire, slapping Rutherford on the shoulder. "Say no more about it. Only, if this rogue turns up at Kidston let me know."

Rutherford nervously rubbed his hands, and gave the promise required.

At this moment, Mr. Wing was sidling up with some diffidence to that part of the drawing-room where Violet Esdaile sat.

"Hem!" said Paul Wing, by way of prelude.

"Yes, Mr. Wing," replied Violet, looking up, as the curate's monosyllable seemed to require some kind of answer.

"The new chaunt has not yet arrived from town," he continued, slipping nervously into an adjacent arm-chair, as if it were made of glass.

"Nothing reaches Garwood under a month," observed Violet in a matter-of-fact way.

"I had hoped," hazarded the curate, leaning towards her in a confidential attitude, "to have induced you to come and hear our choir practise it next Saturday evening."

"You see," said Violet, evasively, "my

uncle does not like dining early, even in summer."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wing, in a rather lackadaisical manner, "what a number of sunsets he must lose by this practice. Do you like sunsets, Miss Esdaile?"

"Rather," replied Violet, who seemed slightly afraid of the topic.

"Oh, I thought you did," faltered the curate, reddening in some confusion; "young ladies, you know, generally do."

"They say they do at any rate," agreed Violet, with a touch of sarcasm, "for one thing, they are more accessible than sunrises."

"What fine pines there are at Garwood," proceeded Wing, in a tremulous voice.

"My uncle grows very few," said Violet, carelessly; "our hot-houses are too old; they are tiresome things to rear and very unwholesome."

"I meant the Scotch firs," explained Wing, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"I'm sure, I beg your pardon," answered Violet, trying to smother a yawn.

Mr. Wing having exhausted pines and sunsets with no brilliant success, now betook himself to more personal topics.

"Do you like young Mr. Raymond?" he interrogated, turning a book of photographs spasmodically over.

"I think I should if I knew him more," allowed Violet, demurely.


"But that is hardly likely to happen," remarked Wing, with some want of caution and a spice of malice.

"Indeed," said Violet, in chill displeasure; "and pray, Mr. Wing, how have you managed to settle that for me?"

"Why you see," stammered Wing, shy and yet desperate, "Mr. Raymond being asked once to the Priory, there the matter ends. The squire has done the civility. That is all."

"Has my uncle said so?" questioned Violet, with flashing eyes.

"N-no," replied Wing, perusing the carpet-pattern, "I cannot say that he has, but that at least is the view taken in Garwood of this young lawyer's invitation to the Priory."



"And does Garwood condescend to assign any reasons for its interdict upon poor Mr. Raymond?" asked Miss Esdaile, now thoroughly nettled.

"Come, come, my dear young lady," insisted the curate, uneasily rubbing his knees, "either there are social distinctions or there are none. You know, as well as I do, that it never has been the custom for either the Garwood lawyer or the Garwood doctor to dine at the Priory. I appeal to Miss Rutherford to confirm me."

Caroline, thus appealed to by the curate, intervened a little reluctantly, but Wing was pertinacious.

"Don't ask me," said Miss Rutherford, hurriedly.

"Permit me," persisted Wing, raising his forefinger. "Miss Esdaile advocates a removal of all barriers between class and class. Now—"

"Keep to the question, Mr. Wing!" exclaimed Violet, repressing herself; "and pray, tell me, Miss Rutherford, if you refuse to dine with a lawyer or a doctor more than once in a way?"

"My best friend is—a doctor," returned Caroline, in a burst of injured confidence.

Violet clapped her hands.

"I alluded to general practitioners," said Wing, feebly endeavouring to cover his retreat.

"And pray," observed Caroline, turning severely upon the curate, "on what grounds do you taboo that most meritorious body of men?"

"Because," said Wing, firing his last shot rather wildly, "neither village lawyers or country doctors usually take rank as gentlemen."

"You mean, I suppose," insisted Violet, mercilessly, "that the clergy does not recognize these professions."

"Miss Esdaile," murmured Wing, in imploring accents, "the clergy, as every one knows, takes rank next after the nobility, and stands even before the army. We are thus placed in the lists of fashionable arrivals at Brighton—and doubtless—elsewhere."

"Dear me," said Violet, rather bitterly,



“how very good it is of you to come here to-night to dine with us poor rustics.”

“Don’t misunderstand me,” stammered the curate, thoroughly routed.

“We quite understand you and your—condescension,” concluded Violet, as a *coup-de-grâce*.

After which remark Paul Wing did not hold up his head again for the rest of the evening, but wandered away in a crest-fallen manner to the hearth-rug; where he endeavoured to warm himself at an imaginary fire: now and then putting his hand out mechanically towards the empty grate, and withdrawing it suddenly in confusion.

When the party broke up, as after no long interval occurred, the guests went their several ways with various topics occupying their thoughts. For example, Caroline Rutherford was not a little perplexed by a visible change in Gilbert Bramley’s manner towards herself at the end of the evening. Whereas, the normal attitude of this gentleman towards ladies of his own class, was one of careless and good-natured tolerance. Philip Ray-

mond was thinking how nice and how charming Violet Esdaile had been. Mr. Rutherford was making moral reflections on the instability of worldly prosperity, and was wishing Christopher Bellamy dead, or hundreds of leagues away from Kidston Manor. His wife was musing whether Gilbert Bramley could be brought to propose to Caroline. Last, Paul Wing was cudgelling his brains how to reinstate himself in the good graces of the maiden of the purple pines : with an occasional doubt whether any compositions of his own would ever attain the dignity of print : and how much longer his tailor would wait without having recourse to legal proceedings.

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